Sanctifying Boldness:
New Testament Women in Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos Melodos

by

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Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in
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ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how three ancient Christian poets scripted female biblical figures as models of emboldened faith for all to emulate. Through imagined speech and narrative embellishment, they brought familiar figures to life for the entertainment, edification, and instruction of their audiences. These male poets, writing in Syriac and Greek, explored the hermeneutical possibilities of female voices and perspectives. While previous scholars have shown that early Christian authors portrayed female martyrs and ascetics subverting normative behavioral expectations, I argue that poetic depictions of biblical women form an additional category of exempla who pressed the bounds of acceptable speech and action. Through attending to the underexplored genre of poetry, this dissertation brings greater depth and nuance to previous accounts of how late ancient Christians constructed holiness and gender.

The dissertation investigates the poetry of three roughly contemporaneous authors from the late fifth and early sixth centuries: Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos Melodos. While these three helped to set the interpretative and theological trajectories of their respective ecclesial communities in the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamian regions, they have never been brought into sustained conversation. Writing in Syriac, Narsai and Jacob were heirs to common literary and theological traditions, while the poems of Romanos Melodos, a Syrian composing in Greek, show thematic and artistic affinities with
Syriac poetry, thus pointing to the interconnectedness of the multilingual regions of the eastern Roman and Persian empires.

Selecting from the sizeable extant corpora of these authors, I focus on poems recounting New Testament narratives about four unnamed women: the Canaanite woman, the Hemorrhaging woman, the Sinful woman, and the Samaritan woman. In the initial three chapters I trace the interrelated themes of the body, ethnicity, and the voice to illuminate the distinct interpretative approaches and exegetical concerns of the three poets. Each of these themes supplies a lens through which the three poets underscore the tenacity of biblical women. Narsai and Jacob emphasize the moral agency of biblical women more consistently than Romanos, in part due to their poetic style as well as their strategies of characterization.

At the heart of the dissertation is a chapter on representations of women’s voices, in which I show how the three poets alternatively depicted transgressive female speech and curbed potential dangers of female audacity. The penultimate chapter examines the constellation of terms the poets use to speak about boldness, employing the tools of feminist and philological analysis to show how idealized religious boldness was created through language subject to the ambiguities of gender. The final chapter reflects on the significance of this reception history for understanding the dynamics of verse exegesis in Late Antiquity. While Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos stand as three independent artists, they jointly contribute to
the poetic mode of biblical interpretation. Inhabiting the voices and vantage points of female biblical characters, the poets produce complex portraits of bold, self-assertive women pursuing the life of faith.

Drawing upon the literary treasury of Syriac and Greek poetry, this study contributes to the historiography of late ancient literature and the construction of gender. It maps new territory in the reception history of these biblical narratives through close, comparative readings that reveal the distinctive portraits of biblical women painted by Syriac and Greek poetic literature. Within liturgical and academic settings where women’s activity and speech were strictly curtailed, these representations of tenacious, outspoken women provide invaluable insights into how Christian authors inhabited marginalized subject positions to imagine idealized models of faith.
Dedication

In memory of my father, David Lawrence Galgay. He was courageous and kind, quick to laughter, quietly faithful, steadfast in his devotion to family and friends, and endlessly loving. I hope that his pride in the dignity and honesty of hard work lives in these pages.
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1. Introduction: The Reception of Unnamed New Testament Women in Late Antique Poetry

(The demons) saw that even a small bird, weak of wing, broke the snare, and it flew and went beyond the fear of their injuries. In the Canaanite woman they saw their own downfall; how the weak rib prevailed against the might of the demons! Come! Feeble race which was defeated by sin, take courage and don spiritual weapons; join the battle and win!¹

In the late-fifth century the Syriac poet and teacher of exegesis, Narsai, composed a mēmrā (narrative poem) praising the intrepid faith of the Canaanite woman from the Gospel of Matthew (15:21-28). Drawn from the end of that poem, the verses quoted above exemplify Narsai’s rhetorical strategy as well as his artistry. As he underscores the woman’s apparent weakness, the poet amplifies the magnitude of her triumph and challenges his listeners to rival her example.² Over the course of more than four-hundred


² Elizabeth A. Clark, “Sex, Shame, and Rhetoric: En-gendering Early Christian Ethics,” Journal of the American Academy of Religion 59, no. 2 (1991): 221-245. Narsai’s rhetoric is far more subtle than that of John Chrysostom, a central figure in Clark’s article. While Clark demonstrates how preachers such as Chrysostom and Gregory of Nazianzus draw attention to gender for the purpose of shaming men, Narsai rarely addresses his reader directly or as pointedly. As we shall see, he intensifies the marginal and lowly
verses, Narsai alternatively exhorts his audience of Syriac-speaking Christians to emulate her emboldened speech and persistence as he praises her spiritual discernment. Within his extant works Narsai reveals little about the performative setting and audience for his poetry, but the fragmentary record of his life suggests that this work may have been recited in the Mesopotamian city of Nisibis, an emerging intellectual center for Christians in the Persian empire under Narsai’s leadership.\(^3\) Before arriving in Nisibis, Narsai had spent much of his earlier life as a student and later as a teacher within the famed School of Edessa, located in the eastern Roman (later Byzantine) empire.\(^4\) An heir to Ephrem (d. 373), the fourth-century luminary of Syriac literature, Narsai drew creatively from inherited traditions as he responded to the needs and expectations of his audience. His writings have shaped the East-Syriac tradition through the present day.\(^5\)

As biblical storytellers and interpreters, poets such as Narsai embellished familiar stories with dramatic dialogue and imaginative expansions, pressing the meager details of the scriptural text to yield spiritual and moral instruction.\(^6\) Due to the low rates of literacy

---


\(^6\) Sebastian P. Brock, “Creating Women’s Voices: Sarah and Tamar in Some Syriac Narrative Poems,” in *The Exegetical Encounter between Jews and Christians in Late Antiquity*, ed. Emmanouela Grypeou and
in antiquity, Christians learned biblical stories through publicly performed poetry crafted for edification as well as entertainment. Female figures, often relegated to the periphery of biblical narratives, became central in the poetry of Syriac and Greek writers. Narsai’s mēmrā about the Canaanite woman exemplifies how a briefly narrated encounter in the Gospel came to life within Syriac poetry. In the poet’s hands, her story inspires imitation as she models an energetic, zealous faith: she struggles to overcome the forces that hamper spiritual growth, and she succeeds against incredible odds.

Within the context of communal worship and the classroom, locations where the movement and voices of women were strictly circumscribed and curtailed, the scripted voices of biblical women expressed spiritual longing and transformation through faith. This study queries what modern scholars of religious and cultural history can learn from hearing the voices of biblical women in verse. How does poetry expand the reception


Recent work on biblical literature in Byzantium has sought to counter post-Reformation tendencies to focus solely on the canonical biblical books and the scriptural text itself. See for instance the essays in Derek Krueger and Robert S. Nelson, eds., *The New Testament in Byzantium*, Dumbarton Oaks Byzantine Symposia and Colloquia (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016). Poetry, along with manuscript illuminations and lectionaries, represents the living and fluid biblical text. For a study of literacy within the period of Late Antiquity and Byzantium, specifically in relation to gender, see Amelia R. Brown, “Psalmody and Socrates: Female Literacy in the Byzantine Empire,” in *Questions of Gender in Byzantine Society*, eds. Bronwen Neil and Lynda Garland (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 57-65. The subject of popularizing and disseminating “official” teaching has also been a topic of recent research. See Jaclyn Maxwell, “Popular Theology in Late Antiquity,” in *Popular Culture in the Ancient World*, ed. Lucy Grig (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 277-295.

history of biblical literature? Furthermore, how did poets speak to their contemporary challenges and concerns by occupying the vantage points of biblical women? Inhabiting the voices of multiple figures, early Christian poets collapsed the biblical past into the present, guiding listeners through an examination of the motivations and morality of these characters. As authors foregrounded marginalized subjects, they relied upon and subverted their listeners’ expectations for how individuals belonging to the lower positions in society should behave. Through examining the poetic Nachleben of unnamed New Testament women, I contend that biblical women join female martyrs and ascetics as figures who could transcend the bounds of normative behavior.

Late ancient and early Byzantine poetry has been an underexplored resource for understanding the discourses and ideological frameworks which conditioned the lives of Christians from diverse social locations. These works provide evidence for the messaging early Christians of all social locations received, and the set of texts examined here are particularly pertinent for understanding the ideologies of gender which structured society in antiquity. While poets addressed men and women alike, the social location of the listener conditioned the reception of these texts. Although the historical record has not preserved the reactions of women to these portrayals, this poetry ought to be read in light of its performative context. Imagining this poetry performed at a vigil or communal worship service reminds us that late ancient Christian women were simultaneously the

objects of the male-authorial imagination as well as the “spectator-subjects,” of these representations of biblical women. In verse, poets produced female figures of extraordinary and celebrated boldness for all Christians to emulate, but these representations of female audacity existed in dynamic and uneasy relationship with the social norms expected of flesh and blood women.

1.1 Topic and Purpose of this Study

The world of Late Antiquity and early Byzantium was steeped in the power of poetic speech. Narsai stands within a rich tradition of poets who enlivened biblical stories for Christian audiences. In the eastern Mediterranean and Mesopotamia, a region home to ancient poetic traditions, Jews intoned Hebrew and Aramaic piyyutim within synagogues as Christian churches reverberated with poetry performed in Greek and Syriac. As they retold biblical stories, Jewish and Christian poets “adapted and transformed” received interpretative traditions, and their verses extend our resources for

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10 Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn’t: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 15. While de Lauretis is concerned with the female consumer of modern cinema, I think her work on women as historical subjects touches upon the relationship between early Christian poetry and its audience. While epistolary literature and theological treatises featuring representations of women would have reached few (presumably elite) women, publicly performed poetry had an extensive audience. As de Lauretis observes: “[the female spectator-subject] is thus doubly bound to that very representation which calls on her directly, engages her desire, elicits her pleasure, frames her identification, and makes her complicit in the production of (her) woman-ness.”

11 The power of rhetoric has been well-established by studies such as Peter Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 41-70. Brown focuses on the formal structures of paideia, and he emphasizes the formation of elite males through the acquisition of verbal prowess. Here I suggest that the popularity of poetry as a medium for religious reflection and biblical story-telling provides further evidence of the power of public performance and speech in Late Antiquity.

studying the reception history of biblical literature beyond the commentary and homiletic genres.\textsuperscript{13} These poems not only instructed but also delighted the ear and stirred the listener’s emotions. Through their finely chiseled verses poets alternatively exhorted, chided, and inspired believers to embrace a rigorous faith.\textsuperscript{14} Employing the techniques of rhetoric and the theater, poets engaged the broader culture and negated strict divisions between spheres of publicly performed speech.\textsuperscript{15}

Within the corpus of late ancient poetry, compositions produced in the eastern Mediterranean region reflect the linguistic, cultural, and theological complexities of the period. A crucible for doctrinal debate and development, the regions of modern-day Turkey, Syria, and Iraq provide fertile ground for studying the development of Christian poetry and its role in inculcating normative behavior and beliefs.\textsuperscript{16} While Greek and

\begin{footnotes}

\item[14] Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Liturgy and Ethics in Ancient Syriac Christianity: Two Paradigms,” \textit{Studies in Christian Ethics} 26, no. 3 (2013): 300-316. Throughout her studies of Syriac poetry, Harvey foregrounds the liturgical setting of this poetry as amplifying its formative power for shaping the ethical and spiritual imaginations of Christian audiences; also Jeffrey Wickes, “Between Liturgy and School: Reassessing the Performative Context of Ephrem’s \textit{Madrāšē},” \textit{Journal of Early Christian Studies} 26, no. 1 (2018): 25-51. While I draw from Harvey’s rich analysis of this literature, I suggest that we must understand poetic literature as functioning in school contexts as well, especially in the case of Narsai. Jeffrey Wickes has recently made a similar case for reading Ephrem’s \textit{madrāšē} as existing within the “blurred performative space between the liturgy and study circle” (29).


\end{footnotes}
Syriac Christian literature have often been studied in isolation from one another, this comparative study demonstrates the mutuality and interconnectedness of the literary cultures which flourished in the eastern Roman and Persian empires. As a dialect of Aramaic, Syriac originated in the environs of Edessa (Syriac 'urhoy), modern day Urfa in southeastern Turkey. As early as the second century, Christianity took root in Northern Syria and Mesopotamia, and the Syriac language was spoken and written throughout the region, eventually extending as far as India and Central Asia. Epigraphic and literary evidence, as well as shifts in translation practices, show the ongoing influence of Greek on Syriac vocabulary and syntax as well as significant rates of bilingualism. The porous linguistic boundary between Greek- and Syriac-speaking Christians laid the foundations for the flowering of Christian poetry within these regions.

One might begin this story at multiple points, but the present study focuses on the cusp of Late Antiquity and early Byzantium: the fifth and sixth centuries. In the formative period of the fourth century, poets such as Ephrem upheld and disseminated the Nicene Trinitarian formulas and modeled patterns of biblical interpretation. As Justinian’s religious policies failed to establish unity in the aftermath of Chalcedon, poets

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18 Aaron Michael Butts, Language Change in the Wake of Empire, Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in Its Greco-Roman Context (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016), 1-5. As Butts recounts, the flourishing of Syriac literature spanned the fourth to the seventh century. Despite being slowly overtaken by Arabic subsequent to the Arab conquests in the seventh century, Syriac experienced a “renaissance” in the twelfth to thirteenth centuries. Living in the Middle East as well as in worldwide diasporas, modern Syriac Christians preserve classical Syriac in their literature and liturgy.
such as Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos engaged contemporary theological debates as they advanced methods of biblical interpretation and story-telling.\textsuperscript{20} Situated in the imperial capital of Constantinople, Romanos does not explicitly address debates over Christological formulations, although one does encounter statements regarding the human and divine natures of Christ within his \textit{kontakia}.\textsuperscript{21}

Each of these writers bequeathed to posterity a sizeable poetic corpus treating a variety of doctrinal and biblical topics. Through privileging poetry about four unnamed women of the New Testament – the Canaanite woman, the Sinful woman, the Hemorrhaging woman, and the Samaritan woman – this project acquires shape as a reception history of a coherent portion of biblical literature. These stories feature similar narrative characteristics as each of these women encounter Jesus and experience revelation of his nature through miraculous healing or divulsion of hidden truth as in the case of the Samaritan woman. While biblical characters abound within the writings of these poets, the unnamed women of the New Testament proved especially fruitful to “think with” as Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos crafted them into exempla of emboldened


faith.\textsuperscript{22} Within the reception histories of these four pericopes there appear moments of convergence when early Christian authors invoke the women in tandem with one another.\textsuperscript{23} These examples illustrate that for early Christian audiences stories of unnamed women formed a “constellation” of stories which resonated with one another. From a narrative perspective these stories each relate an encounter between Jesus and a suffering or marginal human awaiting the transformation of her reality. In this way I find the notion of “liminality,” a feature of Victor Turner’s concept of “social dramas,” amenable to the phenomena present in these stories.\textsuperscript{24} Poets underscore the moments of boundary-crossing and the potential for violations of social norms within these stories; these moments of conflict bring the norms into view, allowing the poets to guide their audience to a proper evaluation of these standards for the Christian life.\textsuperscript{25} The biblical women under examination in this study become models of faith as their stories are rewritten in


\textsuperscript{23} Jeffrey Wickes, “The Poetics of Self-Presentation,” in \textit{Syriac Encounters: Papers presented at the Sixth North American Syriac Symposium, 2011}, eds. Maria Doerrler, Kyle Smith, and Emanuel Fiano (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 60. Wickes observes the connection of these figures within the poetry of Ephrem, but Jacob and Romanos make these connections as well.

\textsuperscript{24} Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and Stories about Them,” in \textit{On Narrative}, ed. W.J.T. Mitchell (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981), 145: “Social dramas occur within groups of persons who share values and interests and who have a real or alleged common history. The main actors are persons for whom the group has a high value priority.”

\textsuperscript{25} Caroline Walker Bynum has long reflected on the relevance of Victor Turner’s theories for historians of medieval Christianity. Although her reception of his thought is critical, she makes a valuable observation: “all Turner’s ideas involve in some way the insight that, in explaining the human experience, one is explaining the process or drama rather than structure, and that liminality or suspension of social and normative structures is a crucial movement in the process.” See her full discussion in \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion} (New York: Zone Books, 1992), 29-31.
verse. Both in Christian and non-Christian texts from antiquity, boldness is not frequently associated with idealized womanhood. Within late ancient authors, the humility of female ascetic subjects is often praised explicitly.\textsuperscript{26} To varying degrees, however, the three poets underscore the role of boldness in the spiritual lives of these unnamed New Testament women. As a reception history of the New Testament, this project uncovers unexplored features of the poetic Nachleben of these female figures. In the process, I argue that the stories of biblical women offered sites for Christian authors to explore the potential as well as the danger of boldness for the life of faith.

1.2 Previous Historiography

The present project, located at the nexus of biblical, Syriac, late ancient, early Byzantine, and gender studies, approaches the poetry of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos as witnesses to and participants in the development of Christian biblical interpretation and teaching. As a historian of the religious movements, languages, and literatures of early Christianity and Late Antiquity, I foreground texts attributed to the so-called “Church Fathers,” whose authority later generations promulgated under the banner of “orthodoxy” variously defined. Labels such as “early Christianity” and “orthodoxy” often risk reification for the sake of convenient categorization. Throughout the early centuries of the Christian movement the boundaries and definition of “Christianity” were continually

\textsuperscript{26} Elizabeth A. Clark, “Asceticism, Class, and Gender,” in The People’s History of Christianity: Late Ancient Christianity, ed. Virginia Burrus (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 220-221. Here Clark uses evidence about wealthy female aristocrats who were praised for forsaking the trappings of their wealth. As Clark argues, this very emphasis on humility underscores their elite status and power.
negotiated, and our attempts to impose such labels obscures continuity with prior religious traditions and the multiple “Christianities” that coexisted.

The religious landscape of the Mediterranean world continued to evolve over these early centuries, but many of the basic questions of legitimacy and power remained constant. While the fourth century ushered in a period of growing institutionalization of the church and involvement of the imperial household, multiple competing groups and interested parties continued to vie over who could claim Christian “orthodoxy” and spiritual authority. The fifth- and sixth-century Christological debates ushered in a new period of strife. By examining Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos – three authors belonging to Christian traditions with distinct views on the Christological formulations – I am continually aware of the contingent nature of “orthodoxy.” While previous scholarship has been preoccupied with the doctrinal stances of these poets, often selectively extracting relevant statements from their works, my attention to their methods of verse exegesis and artistry shifts the conversation to another plane of inquiry, although one with clear consequences for the history of doctrine. The present study attempts a broader view of the diversity of late ancient Christian poetry through the reception history of a commonly held core of authoritative Scripture.

One of the methodological challenges this project raises is the place of literature and religion in the writing of late ancient history. By turning to poetry, I situate myself

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27 Peter Brown provides a comprehensive vision of the transformation of the Mediterranean world from the second century through the crises of the third century in his classic study, *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978).
within a tradition of historiography inclusive of religious literature. The category of “literature,” without equivalent in the ancient world, introduces modern discussions within literary criticism. Simon Goldhill suggests restructuring conversations about the category of “literature” around characteristics of cultural production and reading found in ancient authors themselves: “The imposition of the category of ‘the literary’ thus cuts across the social and cultural significance of the discipline of reading and writing in the ancient world.” Although late ancient poetry appears ahistorical and resistant to the historian’s gaze, scholars of Jewish and Christian literature have increasingly cited poetry’s latent potential to illuminate the cultural and religious contexts in which it was composed. While previous scholars have sought to extract historical content from poetry, Sheldon Pollock suggests that the dichotomy between “history” and “myth” ought to give way to understanding poetry as “textualized forms of history – what these works offer us may be only pre-textures of time, textualized forms of a human experience that make claims about its degrees and types of truth through representations of various states of temporality.” Poets not only interpreted biblical literature, but they also spoke to their contemporary world. As historians, we must keep those dual aims in mind.

The methods and guiding questions from the burgeoning field of comparative hymnography have continually informed this study. While previous comparative studies of Romanos and the Syriac tradition have focused on questions of textual influence and common formal structure, examination of rhetorical tropes and interpretative procedures opens more pathways to fruitful discussion. Through a reception history of related texts it becomes evident that Syriac and Greek Christians “shared a common box of tools, but they used them to build distinctive structures.”

Throughout the chapters that follow I explore a web of interrelated themes: bodies, voices, and markers of difference. In tandem, the parts of this dissertation assume the stance of a “new intellectual history,” as I draw upon resources from fields such as anthropology, social history, literary theory. Informed by post-structuralism, I privilege language as a critical (even inescapable) means through which humans access reality and engage in composing a theoretically informed, intellectual history.

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32 Lieber, “Setting the Stage,” 549. Lieber makes this observation about Jewish and Christian poets within Late Antiquity, but it equally applies to Christians composing in different languages.
1.3 Background for this Study

This study builds on previous scholarship on the history of women and gender in late ancient and early Byzantine Christianity. The rise of Christianity had little effect on the centrality of gender for the social organization of the ancient and late ancient Mediterranean world, but the social and religious implications of gender differences were recast in light of biblical narratives. The lack of early Christian texts penned by women is a continual challenge for historians, who must wrestle with male perspectives on women. Within Byzantine studies, foundational scholarship for the early centuries includes works from Liz James, Alice-Mary Talbot, Leslie Brubaker, and Averil Cameron among others. In light of evidence from Constantinople and its environs, the study of elite and non-elite women has shed light on the daily realities that conditioned

women’s lives in the eastern Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{41} With few known female authors, scholars have mined the writings of Byzantine authors as “sources for women as signs and stories, or ciphers commenting on the men around them.”\textsuperscript{42} From the perspective of legislation and economic history, Angeliki Laiou has emphasized the continuity and conservatism of social structures around gender: “Byzantines, normally reluctant to recognize and accept change, were even more conservative than usual in what concerned women.”\textsuperscript{43} The views expressed by Romanos are symptomatic of this conservative Christian culture.

Syriac studies in recent decades has contributed to the prodigious scholarship on women in the early centuries of Christianity.\textsuperscript{44} The resources for reconstructing the lived realities of Syriac-speaking women is less abundant than the literary evidence we possess

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{42}{Bronwen, “An Introduction to Questions of Gender in Byzantium,” 5.}
\footnote{44}{Sebastian Brock and Susan Ashbrook Harvey have wrestled with the question of female authors in Syriac literature. They discuss the self-proclaimed female authorship within \textit{The Life of Febronia} in \textit{Holy Women of the Syrian Orient} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998), preface, 150-176, and 192-193.}
\end{footnotes}
for mapping the ideologies and assumptions of male authors. Comparison of Greek and Syriac literature allows historians of women and gender in Late Antiquity to capture a more variegated view of how gender was constructed.\textsuperscript{45}

1.4 Key Figures and Terms

Writing in the wake of the fourth-century flowering of Syriac literature, Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos Melodos critically engaged received traditions. Each of these authors set the theological and literary trajectories for their respective ecclesial traditions, and their works were incorporated into the liturgical practices of later generations. While the contours of their interpretative procedure and poetic style will become clearer in later chapters, a preliminary overview of their biographical details will help situate the study within the intellectual and religious milieu of the late ancient and early Byzantine period within the regions of the eastern Mediterranean.

1.4.1 Ephrem

The later fifth- and sixth-century poets were the heirs of the poetic legacy of Ephrem the Syrian. Hailed a Doctor of the Universal Church in 1920 by Pope Benedict XV, Ephrem’s work was known through translation among eastern and western Christians.\textsuperscript{46} Starting in the eighteenth century scholars began to produce edited volumes

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\textsuperscript{45} Uma Narayan, “Essence of Culture and a Sense of History: A Feminist Critique of Cultural Essentialism,” \textit{Hypatia} 13, no. 2 (1998): 86-106. In this article Narayan speaks about the cultural essentialism of western feminism, but I believe her observations remind historians of early Christianity that conclusions drawn from Latin and Greek materials should not be projected upon Syriac Christianity.

of Greek, Syriac, and Latin texts attributed to Ephrem. While western Christians knew of Ephrem’s poetic artistry and his reputation as the “Harp of the Holy Spirit,” their familiarity was largely based on the Greek and Latin works that circulated under his name. Through the work of J. S. Assemani and subsequent scholars, western Christians gained greater access to the Syriac compositions of Ephrem which has animated the liturgical life of Syriac-speaking Christians until the present day. But it was only in the second half of the twentieth century that critical editions by Edmund Beck (1902-1991), Louis Leloir (1911-1992), and others, allowed Ephrem’s work to be fully incorporated in modern scholarship. As by far the most studied author of Syriac literature, Ephrem is often regarded as the pre-eminent representative of what is understood to be “Syriac Christianity.”

1.4.2 Narsai

Narsai (d. ca. 500), whose life spanned the fifth century, witnessed the flowering of Christian learning as well as the tumult of the doctrinal debates which defined the

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48 Sidney H. Griffith, “A Spiritual Father for the Whole Church: The Universal Appeal of St. Ephraem the Syrian,” Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies 1 no. 2 (1998):197-198. As Griffith observes, it is remarkable that Abbé Migne crafted the Patrologia Graeca and the Patrologia Latina without any of the published texts attributed to Ephrem in either language.
50 For a bibliography on Ephrem’s writings in Syriac and other ancient languages (Greek, Armenian, Georgian, Arabic, Old Slavonic, and Latin), and scholarship, see Kees den Biesen, Annotated Bibliography of Ephrem the Syrian. Student Edition (s.l., 2011).
period. The main sources for his life include the *Ecclesiastical History* and the “Cause of the Foundation of the Schools,” both attributed to Barḥadbshabba ‘Arbaya.51 The *History* tells us that Narsai was born within the Northern Mesopotamian region of the Persian empire in ‘Ayn Dulba near Ma’alta (near modern-day Dohuk in Iraqi Kurdistan).52 After his parents died when he was sixteen, he lived with his uncle who was abbot of the Monastery of Kfar Mari on the western side of the Tigris. There he received his preliminary education before going to the School of Edessa. Narsai’s intellectual formation at the School of Edessa would be shaped by the theological and exegetical writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia (d. 428).53 Writing in Edessa and later Nisibis, Narsai composed narrative poems (*mēmrē*) on a variety of doctrinal and biblical subjects over the course of the fifth century.54

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51 For an edition and French translation of the *Ecclesiastical History* see Barḥadbshabba ‘Arbaya, *La second partie de l’histoire ecclésiastique*, ed. François Nau, *Patrologia Orientalia* 9:5 (1913). The “Cause” was published by Addai Scher, *Cause de la fondation des écoles* *Patrologia Orientalia* 4:4 (1908). An English translation of these sources for the life of Narsai exists in Adam Becker’s *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, Translated Texts for Historians 50 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009). For overviews see Lucas Van Rompay, “Narsai,” in *Gorgias Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, eds. Sebastian P. Brock, Aaron M. Butts, George A. Kiraz, and Lucas Van Rompay (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2011), 303-304. Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 11-16. There is scholarly disagreement over the precise identity of Barḥadbshabba, since sources record both Barḥadbshabba ‘Arbaya and Barḥadbshabba of Ḥulwān being active at the same time. Becker discusses the possibility that the two figures are identical as well as the attribution of these compositions. Despite their problematic authorship, these texts are essential resources for understanding the historical memory of Narsai, so I will draw from them with caution and mindful of their internal inconsistencies. See Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 186-187 for a translation and comparison of the relevant passages from the *Cause* 383.7-384.4 and *Ecclesiastical History* 598.14-599.12.

52 Becker, *Sources for the Study of the School of Nisibis*, 49n12.

53 Theodore’s writings were translated over the first half of the fifth century. For an overview of the reception of Theodore within the School of Nisibis and the East-Syrian tradition more broadly, see Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom*, 113-125.

Previous scholarship on Narsai has frequently focused on his poetry as a source for the dyophysite Christology of the East-Syrian Church (nowadays known as the "Church of the East"). In her study of Narsai’s mēmrā 81, “On the Word Became Flesh,” Judith Frishman reads the poem in comparison with statements by Theodore of Mopsuestia. While she concludes that Narsai “simplifies” Theodore’s argument while expounding the biblical text more thoroughly, she underscores that Narsai’s chief concern is to preserve the humanity of Christ and refute opponents who would attribute divine origin to his flesh, whether in total or in part. Frederick McLeod, who has written extensively on the Christology of Theodore and Narsai connects their common view that the Word and Christ share one common prosōpon to the exegesis of the Synoptic Gospels: “the salvific roles that Christ plays throughout his earthly life disclose the mystery of who he is inwardly as a true person.”

1.4.3 Jacob of Serugh

Among Syriac authors, Jacob of Serugh, Bishop of Batnan (ca. 451-521 CE) has long been recognized as one of the greatest poets within the West-Syriac tradition.

Providing the basic outline of his life and remarkable career, later biographies and panegyrics memorialized Jacob as a luminary renowned for his remarkable artistic gifts and personal holiness. Known as the “Flute of the Holy Spirit and Harp of the Church,” Jacob composed lengthy narrative poems or mēmrē, mainly in dodecasyllabic meter, on a variety of scriptural, doctrinal, and devotional subjects. During church celebrations and the commemoration of saints and martyrs, mēmrē were recited presumably by a single voice. While Jacob excelled in the poetic form of the mēmrā, his extant corpus also includes six prose homilies and forty-three letters on assorted topics. Jacob trained at the famed School of Edessa where he was formed in the artistic and interpretative legacy of Ephrem the Syrian (d. 373) and gained exposure to the works of Theodore of Mopsuestia (ca. 350-428) translated from Greek from which he later distanced himself.


62 For the translation and reception of Theodore of Mopsuestia’s works into Syriac, see Becker, Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom, 113-125.
In addition to his fame within the Syriac-speaking world, Jacob’s poetry was later translated into Armenian, Coptic, Georgian, Arabic, and Ethiopic, thus shaping doctrinal and liturgical traditions beyond his native land.\(^63\)

A prolific writer, Jacob left behind a sizeable œuvre covering a broad range of biblical and doctrinal subjects. Reputed to have composed 763 memrē, Jacob’s now extant works are numbered around 380.\(^64\) Long commemorated within the Syrian Orthodox and Maronite churches, Jacob came to the attention of western European scholars through the work of Joseph Simon Assemani (1687-1768), followed by subsequent articles, translations, and studies.\(^65\) Arthur Vööbus offered an essential guide to the complete corpus, and this publication remains an invaluable resource for the manuscripts of Jacob’s works.\(^66\) Scholars engaged in the translation and study of Jacob’s works...
works have principally relied upon the printed edition prepared by Paul Bedjan (1838-1920), Homiliae selectae Mar Jacobi Sarugensis. Appearing between 1905 and 1910, these volumes made at least 195 mēmrē available, roughly half of Jacob’s total extant corpus. Sebastian Brock later updated Bedjan’s edition with some additional material in 2002, reprinted in 2006. More recently Roger Akhrass and Imad Syryani made a considerable number of previously unpublished mēmrē accessible for the first time.

1.4.4 Romanos Melodos

Born in the Syrian city of Emesa (modern day Homs) in 485 CE, Romanos’s early life remains shrouded in obscurity. In Beirut he served as a deacon and thereafter moved to Constantinople during the reign of Anastasius I (491-518). In the imperial capital Romanos thrived as a composer of poetic compositions until about 551. Sources written centuries after the death of Romanos recount the divine source of his inspiration: one Christmas eve, the hymnographer received a roll of papyrus from Mary. Upon swallowing the scroll Romanos awoke and sang out in praise.

While Narsai and Jacob worked within the Syriac poetic form of the mēmrā, Romanos composed kontakia, from the Greek word kontos, referring to the rod around

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which parchment scrolls were rolled. Sung during the liturgy, these compositions retold biblical tales in metrical verse. A prodigious number of *kontakia*, as many as one thousand, have been attributed to Romanos, however, as Grosdidier de Matons notes only 89 are extant. Of these, only 58 are authentic in the judgment of Grosdidier de Matons. Romanos selected tales from both the Old and New Testaments, highlighting events from Jesus’s life as well as the Virgin Mary. The prominence of the Theotokos within the genuine *kontakia* is all the more striking for the variety of roles and emotive states in which she appears: inquisitive maiden at the Annunciation, mourning mother at the foot of the cross, and intercessor.

In light of Romanos’s biography, the question of his relationship to the Syriac language and literature has been the subject of debate. One of the preeminent scholars and editors to work on Romanos, J. Grosdidier de Matons, denied any direct assimilation of Syriac poetic form into the *kontakion*. Nevertheless, he saw a confluence of traditions in the work of Romanos:

> In him the rich tradition of Syriac hymnography meets two other properly hellenistic traditions, that of the poetic homily and that of liturgical poetry. In order to avoid unduly simplifying the schema, we will observe that these three traditions...  

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traditions have already influenced on another extensively before the formation of the *kontakion*, and that as much with respect to the form as to substance.\textsuperscript{74}

In the centuries after his death, Romanos has been celebrated for his unparalleled skill in composing *kontakia*. The homiletic character of this poetical form has been frequently noted, with some describing it as a “poetical sermon.”\textsuperscript{75} Recent scholars, especially in light of the flowering of Syriac studies, have advanced a more positive and open posture toward Romanos’s relationship to Syriac language and poetry without arguing for direct borrowing.\textsuperscript{76} Given the position of the performance of the *kontakion* within the liturgy and the connotations of “sermon” and “homily,” I will avoid such naming practices in favor of using the specific term, *kontakion*, and refer to it as a form of liturgical poetry.

As Wellesz notes, Greek authors referred to this form by a wide range of terms including ὕμνος, ψαλμός, ποίημα, ὁδή, ἄνος, and προσευχή to name a few.\textsuperscript{77}

The structure of the *kontakion* is linked by an acrostic, a feature resembling Hebrew and Syriac poetic form.\textsuperscript{78} Romanos’s *kontakia* frequently feature the line “song

\textsuperscript{74} Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode: et les*, 4: “En lui se rencontrent avec la riche tradition de l’hymnographie syrienne deux autres traditions proprement helléniques, celle de l’homélie poétique et celle de la poésie liturgique. Pour éviter de simplifier indûment le schéma, on notera dès maintenant que ces trois traditions avaient déjà largement réagi les unes sur les autres avant la formation du kontakion, et cela tant pour la forme que pour la matière” (Translation mine).


\textsuperscript{78} Arentzen, *Virgin in Song*, 8-10.
by the humble Romanos” instead of an alphabetical acrostic. The poem is made up of eighteen to thirty stanzas (*troparia*), which are modeled on the model stanza or *hiermos* (εἱρμός); the poet’s artistry resides in the ability to maintain the setting of main accents in the following lines, allowing the melodic and metrical “highlights” to remain parallel. At the outset of the piece a truncated *troparion*, with its own metrical pattern, known as the *prooemium* or *koukoulion*, which often sets forth some of the primary themes explored in the piece.79

Romanos’s hymns were sung at the church of the Theotokos in the Kyrou district within the northern district of Constantinople. These were “occasional” compositions, composed for festivals of the church calendar and performed during nocturnal vigils.80 Outside the eucharistic service, these “paraliturgical” hymns bolstered the liturgy of the Word and amplified the vigil’s themes and central stories. According to Georgia Frank, such a setting fostered Romanos’s “prob[ing]” of the biblical text while simultaneously allowing him to press beyond the strict confines of the text.81

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79 Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origines*, 40-42. De Matons cautions against the assumption that the *prooemium* consistently sets forth major themes.
1.5 Important Terms

1.5.1 Late Antiquity

This project is informed by the historiography of Late Antiquity, a burgeoning field within recent decades. In the early twentieth century, the Art Historian Alois Riegl began to use the term “Spätantike” for the transitional period of the late Roman empire. As cultural and religious historians have adopted the term, it has continually challenged traditional decline narratives and upheld the principle that the literature and art of this period is worthy of serious study. A key question arises over the boundary between “Late Antiquity” and “Byzantium.” For some, Byzantine studies begins with Constantine I and the founding of Constantinople in 330, but others would situate the field in the sixth and seventh century onward. As the field of Late Antiquity has gained adherents, it has pushed increasingly later, with some exponents pushing the boundaries of the field toward the rise of Islam and beyond.

Over the past two decades, the study of Late Antiquity has looked increasingly eastwards. The proliferation of writing in Syriac from the fourth century through the

\[\text{For example, Alois Riegl, } \textit{Die Spätromische Kunstindustrie nach der Funden in Österreich-Ungarn} \text{ (Vienna: K.K. Hof- und Staatsdrückeri, 1901).} \]

\[\text{Edward James, “The Rise and Function of the Concept ‘Late Antiquity,’” } \textit{Journal of Late Antiquity} 1, no. 1 (2008): 20-30. The significance of poetry and the influence of Syriac for narrating the literary history of the period has long been recognized, as Han Lietzmann demonstrates in “Das Problem der Spätantike,” } \textit{Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften} 31 (1927): 348-349. \]

\[\text{Averil Cameron, } \textit{Byzantine Matters} \text{ (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 4-6.} \]

\[\text{An important article on Late Antiquity as a field remains Andrea Giardina’s “Esplosione di tardoantico,” } \textit{Studi storici} 40 (1999): 157-180. Later an English translation appeared in } \textit{Late Antiquity on the Eve of Islam}, \text{ ed. Averil Cameron (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 1-23.} \]

\[\text{James, “The Rise and Function of the Concept of ‘Late Antiquity,’” } \text{25-27. Edward This development has been a source of controversy. In his 2008 article, James suggests that the field has shown a predilection for focusing on the eastern Mediterranean and foregrounding religious and spiritual topics. James’s} \]
centuries following the rise of Islam has extended traditional historiographical conceptions of periodization and geography. As Syriac, Armenian, Georgian, and Coptic have become accessible through translation and improved graduate training, however, the field of Late Antiquity must continue to de-center historiography from traditional nodes of scholarly attention. Syriac studies has the potential to critically engage and deploy the questions and methodologies of late ancient and Byzantine studies while maintaining its emphasis on the language, literature, and history of Syriac-speaking Christians.

1.5.2 Audience and Setting

Modern scholars encounter late antique poetry through reading, but it is essential to bear in mind the performance of these compositions within original settings. Recreating the performance contexts for this poetry poses complex challenges which vary for each of our authors. Many of the poems under examination here were performed within the context of the liturgy. Performed within the settings of early Christian communal worship, such compositions must be understood as a part of a larger web of scriptural texts, prayers, and ritual actions. As these compositions “explore” the life of faith, the biblical past, and ethical reasoning, they offer another option beyond critique, legitimate in light of the relative neglect of Britain and northern Gaul, points to the efforts of scholars such as Peter Brown to broaden historiography to include sources beyond those composed in Greek and Latin.

theological treatises and moralistic homilies. Placing these compositions into conversation with lectionary readings, for example, raises particularly challenging problems due to the diversity of customs and the paucity of evidence.

The performance of these compositions within the worship space raises questions concerning the position of the performer in relation to the audience. Reconstructing the liturgical space is notoriously difficult given the continual alteration of church buildings over the centuries and the fraught relationship between textual witnesses and material remains.

1.6 Guiding Questions and Themes

1.6.1 Gender and the Construction of “Woman”

By foregrounding poems featuring biblical women, this study raises questions of “gender” as a lens for studying history. Joan Wallach Scott’s two propositions for

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90 Gerard Rouwhorst, “Continuity and Discontinuity between Jewish and Christian Liturgy,” *Bijdragen Tijdschrift voor Philosophie en Theologie* 54 (1993): 78-81. The Syriac-speaking population dwelling in Antioch and the lands to the east, according to Gerard Rouwhorst and scholars of early liturgy, read the Torah and Prophets on the traditional Jewish Sabbath for a long period of time. Rouwhorst notes the increasingly “Gentile” profile of the Christian population, attributing the continuance of “Jewish” reading practices to the “Jewish Christian” population of these areas. Rouwhorst relies on the writings of Justin Martyr from Rome to show that there was no reading of the Old Testament in connection with the Eucharist. In contrast, the *Apostolic Constitutions*, hailing from Antioch by the end of the fourth century, show a distinct reverence for the Sabbath (II.36.1, II.59.3; VI.23.3; VII.23.3, VII.36.1, VIII.33.1-2, and VIII.47.64) as well as two Old Testament readings in connection with the Eucharist (one from the Law and the second from the Prophets).

composing a feminist historical account are paradigmatic for the present work: “gender is a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes, and gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power.”92 Applying the category of gender to ancient sources requires constant awareness of the “conceptual travel” that allows us to observe the construction of “woman” within ancient literature without ignoring the historical specificity of gender discourses.93

Often invoking gender stereotypes and inverting expectations, male poets contribute to the history of women and gender in Late Antiquity. As authors deepened the characterizations of these women, they engage received religious and cultural ideologies of gender and actively fashioned representations of women. One of the challenges this study confronts is the question of representation. These male-authored poems do not offer us the voices or perspectives of flesh and blood women, but rather portrayals of females. As we shall explore further in the fourth chapter on the dramatization of women’s voices, scholars in the field of Classics have long wrestled with the opportunities and pitfalls of such depictions. Avoiding the extremes of either reading these female figures naively as offering access to ancient women or being mere projections of the male imagination, I seek to understand how these works participate critically in the discourse of gender in Late Antiquity. As poets conceptualized boldness and divine encounter through narrating these biblical episodes, the gender of female

protagonists was not incidental; gender “conditioned” the words and actions as they re-inscribed ideals about faithful witness and gender difference.94

Biblical narratives, and by extension, biblical storytelling worked in tandem to bring the biblical past to life for audiences, allowing Christian writers to “sketch a vision of the future.”95 The idealized female believer provided not only a canvas for depicting a zealous, earnest faith, but also for reinforcing gender dichotomies. In the close readings that follow I employ the tools of feminist analysis to illuminate the dynamics of gender within these works. Drawing on an eclectic mix of feminist theorists, I emphasize the role of language and semiotic systems in the construction of gender ideals. Rather than approaching “woman” or the “feminine” as belonging to a given, essential female nature, I treat gender as a “posit or construct, formalizable in a non-arbitrary way through a matrix of habits, practices, and discourses.”96 As arbiters of ecclesial authority, poets participated in broader theological, liturgical, and interpretative conversations that shaped ideals around social order and religious values.

As poets narrate the biblical stories featuring unnamed New Testament women, they craft representations of women who exemplify ideal religious receptivity. How do

94 David Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love (New York: Routledge, 1990), 117. Writing about Diotima within The Symposium of Plato, Halperin upholds the centrality of her gender for understanding her speech and role within dialogue.
95 Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity,” 163.
we make sense of the contrast between the dire portraits of Eve’s vice and soaring encomiums on the exemplary faith of some women? Through telling the stories of biblical women, poets did not simply replicate the assumptions of biblical authors around gender but refracted received ideas around gender and “woman” through the prism of Scripture, “obscuring” the historical contingency of those assumptions and naturalizing them.

The theme of boldness weaves throughout these portrayals of female characters, raising the question of self-assertion and initiative. Through contrasting texts authored by men and women in the Middle Ages, Carolyn Walker Bynum has found strong evidence for men strengthening the gender binary by attributing dominance, reason, and discernment to the male and relegating mercy, weakness, and undesirable traits to women. Scholars of Syriac Christianity do not have access to texts authored by women, but these poems do not reflect the binary Bynum finds in male texts. While poets could certainly depict female characters as subject to vice and lust, their poetry on unnamed New Testament women portrays these figures as explicitly bold, overcoming their weakness through the strength of faith. Here feminist analysis of Christian literature must contend with male writers attributing qualities associated with masculinity to female figures. As we shall see, the polarities of boldness may be found in female biblical

99 Bynum, Fragmentation and Redemption, 175.
characters: impudence and faithful audacity are contingent upon the inner qualities of love and faithfulness. These praise-worthy exemplars do not prompt their authors to reflect on the subordinate status of women within their flocks, but they represent notable exceptions to the ideal of female submission.\textsuperscript{100}

1.6.2 Body

For early Christian authors, the human body possessed a charged potentiality. A fundamental shift in the perceptions and expectations of the human body accompanied the rise of Christianity.\textsuperscript{101} The sociologist Bryan S. Turner observes the malleability of the body within discourse: “The body is at once the most solid, the most elusive, illusory, concrete, metaphorical, ever present and ever distant thing – a site, an instrument, an environment, a singularity and a multiplicity.”\textsuperscript{102} From an anthropological perspective, the individual body provides a “natural symbol” for thinking about the social body and prescribing regulation for the body politic.\textsuperscript{103} Over the course of the early centuries of Christianity, writers realized the capacity of the material world and the human body to communicate spiritual truths, fostering their corporeal rhetoric and commitment to the

\textsuperscript{100} Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity,” 178-181.
\textsuperscript{101} Brown, \textit{The Body and Society}, 29-30: “It is not sufficient to talk of the rise of Christianity in the Roman world simply in terms of a shift from a less to a more repressive society. What was at stake was a subtle change in the perception of the body itself. The men and women of later centuries were not only hedged around with a different and more exacting set of prohibitions. They had also come to see their own bodies in a different light.”
role of the senses within the Christian life. The prominence of ascetic discourses around the body and sexual renunciation has led scholars to provide nuanced analyses of hagiographical exempla, ascetic treatises, and epistolary literature as constitutive of early Christian views. These highly prescriptive texts give the impression that all Christians aspired to ascetic ideals, obscuring the lived realities of men and women whose Christian practices were inclusive of marital intercourse and reproduction.


105 The scholarship on the body and sexual renunciation within early Christianity is immense. Through the theoretical insights of Michel Foucault’s The History of Sexuality, Peter Brown shaped the trajectory of subsequent scholarship in the field of Late Antiquity with The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity. In his reading of Paul, Daniel Boyarin links anthropological dualism with the Apostle’s hermeneutical stance, distinguishing the “letter” of the text from spiritual signification found therein. As Boyarin helpfully distinguishes, dualism such as that found in Paul does not necessarily “devalue” the body but assumes a hierarchy of spirit and body (15). I would argue that the Greek and Syriac authors under examination here maintain this hierarchy without dismissing the material world. Within earlier scholarship on asceticism, Syriac Christianity was often cited for its “heroic” ascetic practitioners and its allegedly “dualistic” orientation. This view has been expressed with variant degrees of nuance. One may mention Walter Bauer’s Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzerrei im ältesten Christentum, first published in 1934; revised with supplements by Georg Strecker in 1964; first translated into English, Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity, eds. R.A. Kraft and G. Krodel (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); H.J.W. Drijvers, East of Antioch: Studies in Early Syriac Christianity (London: Variorum, 1984) and idem, History and Religion in Late Antique Syria (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 1994). More recent treatments have revised reductionistic assessments, capturing the overall diversity of the region while upholding the centrality of the body within the theological anthropology and vision of salvation among Syriac authors. See, for instance, Hannah Hunt, Clothed in the Body: Asceticism, the Body and the Spiritual in the Late Antique Era (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012).

106 Averil Cameron, “Desire in Byzantium – the Ought and the Is,” in Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997, ed. Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 207. For an example of the competing discourses around marriage and sexual renunciation see David Hunter, Marriage, Celibacy, and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007). As Hunter demonstrates, the Jovinian controversy shows how non-ascetic approaches to the body had wide-spread support despite being obscured within ascetic literature. Ascetic writers offered different and competing views of celibacy and marriage within a social context where traditional values of marital concord and reproduction still dominated.
Scholarship on the Graeco-Roman world over recent decades has continually developed the body as a “conceptual field” for understanding the past and its legacies. Dispensing with assumptions of bodies as ahistorical and unified, scholars working with the various corporeal realities of late antique literature have problematized the body as a historical, cultural, and gendered construction. The present study attends to the poetic representations of bodies marked as gendered. How did poets engage (or subvert) societal assumptions about sexual difference? While this textualized body is not entirely removed from the representations found in hagiographies and theological treatises, a focused treatment on poetry allows us to appreciate how constraints of form and artistic style fashion the gendered body distinctly through verse. Furthermore, poetry showcased a cast of biblical characters distinct from the holy men and women of hagiography: by selecting “models of salvageable sinners,” poets created “icons of moral development”

109 Among feminist theorists there is much debate about the distinction between sex and gender. In one sense I use gender to emphasize the constructed nature of the textual bodies at the center of my work. I follow Joan Scott’s defense of gender to speak about the historical and social consequences of sexual difference: “The word denoted a rejection of the biological determinism implicit in the use of such terms as ‘sex’ and ‘sexual difference’ (“Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” The American Historical Review 91, no. 5 (1986): 29); Val Plumwood, “Do We Need a Sex/Gender Distinction?,” Radical Philosophy 51 (1989): 7. Plumwood argues that gender “elaborates” biological differences of sex. Nonetheless, I acknowledge the critique of Toril Moi that biological determinism can be avoided without overdetermining the distinction between sex and gender or rendering sex as an abstract disembodied category (Sex, Gender and the Body: The Student Edition of What is a Woman? [New York: Oxford University Press, 2005], 22-59).
rather than the *alter Christus* found in the lives of holy ascetics. The “poetic” women under investigation here are depicted in the throes of spiritual transformation.

The centrality of the body as the site of salvation has long been emphasized and richly explored within Syriac studies. As poets narrated these women’s stories as “social dramas,” tracing a processual movement from spiritual and social alienation to resolution, the characters’ relationship to their own bodies – as well as to that of Christ – evolves. The body serves as a material marker of their spiritual advancement as well as a means of expression. By attending to the poetic body, I query the ways our poets depict, characterize, and problematize corporeality within a distinctive genre of writing. Late ancient poets not only described and spoke about the body, but they also scripted characters who articulated their embodied suffering and longing. This larger study extends our understanding of early Christian approaches to the gendered body through privileging Syriac and Greek poetic treatments of unnamed New Testament women. Within these compositions we uncover representations of female bodies as diseased, tainted through attributions of sexual promiscuity, and lacking the integrity and closure which characterized the body of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Although poets maintained

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111 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Embodiment in Time and Eternity: A Syriac Perspective,” *St Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 43, no.2 (1999): 129: “In existential terms the body is where we experience God; it is where we receive divine initiative. Further, the body expresses our response to what we receive: it provides the activity by which we articulate our relationship to the divine.” I will survey the immense literature of the body as a category of analysis for the broader field of Late Antiquity in 2.1.2.
112 Thomas J. Csordas, “Somatic Modes of Attention,” *Cultural Anthropology* 8, no. 2 (1993): 135. The body is distinguished from embodiment: “[T]he body is a biological, material entity, while embodiment can be understood as an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world.”
the prescriptive and moral force of traditional biblical exegesis, their attribution of speech to female characters represents an exploration of positionality and subjectivity that adds dynamism to their interpretation of biblical narratives. Through elevating the physicality of the encounters between unnamed women and Christ, poets “somatize” the religious experience of theophany.\textsuperscript{113} Through inhabiting the voices of women, Christian poets – although male – explored a complex range of human emotions and experiences from diverse vantage points.\textsuperscript{114}

While the visual arts provided one avenue for representing the female body, Christian literature interpreted and translated bodies through language. Writing about the relationship of visual and textual images, W.J.T. Mitchell observes the challenge of comparison:

Poetry is an art of time, motion, and action; painting an art of space, stasis, and arrested action. The comparison of poetry and painting dominates aesthetics, then, precisely because there is so much resistance to the comparison, such a large gap to be overcome.\textsuperscript{115}

Christian literature conveyed verbal images of women embedded within “textual structures” that naturalized such images and communicated “an imaginary (ideological)

\textsuperscript{113} Bynum, \textit{Fragmentation and Redemption}, 189-200.
\textsuperscript{114} Mairéad McAuley, \textit{Reproducing Rome: Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius}, Oxford Studies in Classical Literature and Gender Theory (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 257. For McAuley, male authors employed female characters to explore “emotional states and vulnerabilities culturally and ideologically prohibited to them.”
relationship” between material reality and literary representation. Liturgical and pedagogical poetry contain myriad representations of women’s voices and their bodies, but these representations are never stable. Through constructing biblical women in verse, poets creatively reflected, bolstered, and subverted received approaches to the body and human sexuality.

The poetic body belongs to the realm of textuality, but it serves as a prism for refracting religious and cultural discourses through the personal artistic and theological predilections of our authors. The ideal of the virginal female body is diffuse within early Christian literature, holding a prominent place within Syriac and Greek poetry through hymnography on Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as Christ’s virginal body. Attending to poetic narrations of the women who encounter Christ enlarges the scope of our study to gendered bodies apart from the idealized virginal body.

While ascetic voices dominate the literary evidence of late ancient Christianity, countless lay Christians continued to reconcile married life with their religious practices. As widely consumed compositions, poetry promulgated a more expansive view of embodiment, providing scholars an avenue to pursue the suggestion of Béatrice Caseau:

If we stop focusing on ideas about virginity and ask the sources about gestures, bodily attitudes, and the use of the senses in a religious environment, quite a different picture of the body emerges from that offered by scholars of the virginal

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117 Within Syriac studies and late antiquity more broadly, Mary has been a well-studied figure for her centrality to configurations of ideal femininity. Thomas Arentzen has shed light on the fecund potentiality of Mary’s virginity within the kontakia of Romanos in The Virgin in Song, 46-87. For the nature of Marian virginity in the writings of Ephrem, see Julia Kelto Lillis, “Virgin Territory: Configuring Female Virginity in Early Christianity,” PhD diss., (Duke University, 2017), 167-198.
life. In what manner did the Church invite Christians, including the kosmikoi, married men and women and soon-to-be-married children, to use their bodies in sacred spaces?118

The biblical women examined here, praised as exemplars of faith rather than virginity, shed light on the broader religious landscape of Christian ideals.

1.6.3 Ethnicity

As we explore the verse exegesis of the Gospel narratives about the Canaanite and Samaritan women, we will turn our attention to the ways poets invoke and embellish “ethnic” labels of biblical figures. In their positions of religious authority, Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos built on received traditions, constructing representations of individuals and communities. To employ the observation of Benedict Anderson, characteristics of a nation or group contribute to the sense of an “imagined community.” While most individuals “will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community,” and one could extend this observation to images of external “imagined” communities as well.119 The omnipresent emphasis on universality within Christian discourse subsumes differences within a projected vision of unity. In contrast to the impulse to preserve difference, the undertones of inclusion and assimilation can serve to relativize or de-legitimize social


frameworks based on “ethnic” or linguistic identities. Denise Buell has framed this tension as one between fixity and fluidity of categories: “Universalism and conversion both imply a fluidity that race and ethnicity seem to lack (when viewed as ‘fixed’).” Paul’s challenge to the Galatians, a prime example of the tendency to relativize boundaries, disrupts and threatens to circumvent rigid social structures and binaries. Modern scholarship on Paul has queried the legacies of such readings in anti-Jewish and anti-Semitic forms of Christian discourse. In light of the virulence of Christian anti-Judaism and its role in the Holocaust, New Testament scholars working within the “New Perspective on Paul” pushed back against reductive and erroneous understandings of Judaism and challenged interpretations – many coming out of the Reformation period – that painted Judaism as the ethnocentric, legalistic foil for Christian universalism to supplant. In light of the “New Perspective,” Paul’s statements within his epistles, occasional and with specific audiences in mind, must be carefully assessed for how he envisions religious practice among former Gentiles entering the church as distinguished

122 The bibliography re-evaluating the Pauline corpus is immense and falls largely outside the scope of the immediate project. This literature does, however, wrestle with the question of Christianity’s relationship to the “Gentiles” and the emerging conceptions of Israel from within the Jesus movement and later generations. See E.P. Sanders, Paul and Palestinian Judaism: A Comparison of Patterns of Religion (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977); James D.G. Dunn, The Theology of Paul’s Letter to the Galatians (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993); Francis Watson, Paul, Judaism, and the Gentiles: Beyond the New Perspective (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007).
from those born within communities observant of Jewish laws and practices. Responding to the “New Perspective” on Paul, Daniel Boyarin has introduced larger questions about the role of hermeneutics in preserving or negating various forms of human “difference” such as sex and ethnicity. Boyarin argues forcefully that Paul’s hermeneutical practice of allegory, along with his philosophical bent towards a Greco-Roman privileging of unity, erases bodily “Jews” as the consequence of a “coercive universalism.”

While Pauline epistles have been fertile ground for scholarly reflection on the endurance of difference and the significance of Jesus’s life and death for the boundaries of Israel, the Gospel narratives speak about differences among social groups in their own distinctive ways. Interpretation of these passages, as we shall explore, became part of a larger project of depicting a unified Christian church assembled from the “Nations,” a process that later Christians saw presaged and inaugurated within the book of Acts. Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos wrote for particular Christian communities, but their writings project a vision of Christianity as an integral, trans-communal entity. They

123 Dunn, The Theology of Paul the Apostle, 523. Speaking to the issue of Paul’s relationship to historical Israel and his contemporaries, Dunn calls attention to the delicate maneuvers of Paul’s theology concerning the Gentiles and the Law: “His concern was not to establish churches which were other than Israel. His concern was rather that the full scope of God’s people, the Israel of grace, might be fully constituted. His own experience of being pulled in both directions was itself an expression of Israel caught in the overlap of the ages.”

124 Boyarin, A Radical Jew: Paul and the Politics of Identity, 13-18. See also Elizabeth Castelli, Imitating Paul: A Discourse of Power (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1991). Castelli gives voice to the ethical implications of such philosophical orientations, “This treatment of difference has profound implications for processes of social formation, because it suggests that difference must be subversive of unity, harmony, and order” (86).

frequently betray an awareness of the doctrinal and social divisions plaguing their individual ecclesial communities. Within Romanos’s poetry, for instance, one frequently encounters ethnic labels and reflection on linguistic multiplicity within the context of evangelization, such as his *kontakion* on Pentecost. The opening lines set forth the themes he will unfold throughout the text:

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Ὅτε καταβὰς τὰς γλώσσας συνέχεε,
Διεμέριζεν ἔθνη ὁ υψίστος;
ὅτε τοῦ πυρὸς τὰς γλώσσας διένειμεν,
εἰς ἐνότητα πάντας ἐκάλεσε.
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When the Most High descended, he confused tongues,
Divided the peoples;
When He distributed the tongues of fire,
He called all to unity.\(^{126}\)

Linking the episode of the Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) with the events of Acts 2, Romanos traces the arch of salvation history proceeding from fragmentation to unity. Multilingualism becomes an epiphenomenal condition of human existence, laden with symbolic value as a reminder of social disintegration due to sin. The momentum of the redemptive process begun in the Incarnation is healing of such divisions.

While the evangelical spirit of Christianity fostered discourses of strident universalism, authors could also present the community of believers as possessing rigid boundaries capable of resisting those holding “erroneous” or heterodox religious viewpoints. Simultaneously, such boundaries could be easily surmounted through

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conversion. These projections of a church from the “nations” bear within themselves the seams and contrasting voices involved in these debates, reflecting the nature of scripture. Attention to the “dialogic imagination” of early Christian texts, to invoke the Bakhtinian phrase, allows the modern reader to view both the articulation and maintenance of boundaries between the Christian and others, but also the persistent inter-penetration and mutual dependence of these discourses: “Dialogues internalize the other, creating fissures and contradictions within.”

In Late Antiquity, Syriac- and Greek-speaking Christians attended to markers of identity in the biblical narrative through intertextual reading strategies, culling their scriptures for references to these peoples and tracing lines of ancestry. Subtly interweaving biblical history into their interpretation, poets sought to inform the Christian self-consciousness of their audiences, cultivating a sensibility that the history and mission of the Church was part of the biblical historical framework.

Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos contributed to larger Christian discourses that presented the church as the “true Israel” and contemporary Christians as descendants of the apostolic mission to the Gentiles.

Verse exegesis, like its prosaic commentary counterparts, exhibits an intertextual sensibility of biblical reading that cannot be reduced to simple citations. This literature embodies Roland Barthes’ classic statement of the “intertextual”:

> The intertextual in which every text is held, itself being the text-between of another text, is not to be confused with some origin of the text: to try to find the ‘sources’, the ‘influences’ of a work, is to fall with the myth of filiation; the

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citations which go to make up a text are anonymous, untraceable, and yet already read: they are quotations without inverted commas.¹²⁸

Early Christians read these narratives in light of the Pauline epistles and with a canonical sensibility that deemed all of Scripture useful and, despite superficial contradictions, mutually reinforcing.¹²⁹ Our poets narrated and expanded the New Testament episodes in light of a biblical historiography that contained within itself the textual layers of a larger “signifying system” of Scripture.¹³⁰ As we shall see, such interpretative strategies reified perceptions about the moral turpitude and religious deviance of those peoples outside the boundaries of Israel prior to the Incarnation.

One of the underlying tensions within the New Testament is the scope of Jesus’s ministry and his significance for those outside of Israel, the “Gentiles.” Within the Gospel attributed to Matthew, for example, Jesus tells his disciples not to enter any town of the Samaritans (10:5), but in the wake of the resurrection, he commissions them to “go and make disciples among all the nations” (28:19).¹³¹ Among the thin characterizations and meager details of the Gospels, biblical writers attached terms of ethnic and regional identity to several figures, leading biblical scholars to debate the presence of “Gentiles”

¹²⁹ Over the first centuries the content of authoritative scripture shifts as the process toward canonization unfolds. I use this term in a capacious sense of the largely recognized contents of the New Testament canon such as the synoptic Gospels and Gospel of John while acknowledging that individual texts (such as Revelation) have a more complicated reception history.
¹³⁰ Daniel Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 94: “Intertextuality is, in a sense, the way that history, understood as cultural and ideological change and conflict, records itself within textuality. As the text is the transformation of a signifying system and of signifying practice, it embodies the more or less untransformed detritus of the previous system. These fragments of the previous system and the fissures they create on the surface of the text reveal conflictual dynamics which led to the present textual system.”
¹³¹ Mt 28:19 πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη.
within the community of the evangelists and whether these communities were engaged in missionary activities explicitly targeting Gentiles.\textsuperscript{132} For the biblical writers such markers contained explanatory value, and they relied on their reader sharing a socially and culturally conditioned repertoire of associations and stereotypes. Long after the composition of the New Testament, these narrative details continued to animate the imaginations of later readers and interpreters, who were most often living far from the region of Palestine. These authors deployed stereotypes around the “imagined communities” of the Canaanites and Samaritans not only to explain the text within its immediate context but also to extend these assumed characteristics to unbelievers among the poets’ contemporaries.\textsuperscript{133}

In many ways the nuance of modern research on the various meanings of “ethnicity” as a category of social organization exists uncomfortably next to the usages of early Christian writers, who emphasize religious practice and generally give very little


\textsuperscript{133} Anderson, \textit{Imagined Communities}, 8. While Anderson focuses his analysis on the 19\textsuperscript{th} and 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries and the rise of the nation-state, I find the notion of “imagined” collectives fertile to think with as we explore the attributes Christians assigned to groups such as the “Canaanites.”
content to these labels. Guided by these clues, early Christian interpreters explored the implications of these descriptors, and commentators underscored the explanatory value of these labels for understanding the moral and religious significance of their narratives for Christian believers. In cultivating an intersectional approach to these representations of women, I seek to capture the multi-dimensionality of their identities and how they functioned within the Christian biblical imaginary.

Syriac and Greek poets inherited and adapted biblical and cultural social categories and participated in the perpetuation of an image of the Church as an aggregate of the nations, in opposition to a post-Pentecost Jewish community.\(^\text{134}\) In this chapter, my inquiry into the ethnic rhetorics of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos bears on the larger discussion of how liturgical poetry mirrors the polemical discourses of adversus Judaeos literature.\(^\text{135}\) Previous scholarship on the polemic of Syriac authors against a variously constructed “Judaism” have often studied the contours of this pervasive discourse.\(^\text{136}\)

With Ephrem as a literary forebear, our poets inherited Christian theological discourses

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\(^\text{134}\) Jonathan Hall, *Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 47. Hall distinguishes between strategies of oppositional and aggregative ethnic construction with Greek historiography. The generality of these terms call attention to the fluid and constructive nature of these terms.


and methods of interpretation built around and against a posited “Jewish” other.137

Echoing the binaries Ephrem used, later Greek and Syriac poets employed an
“oppositional ethnic construction” of non-Israelites in their exposition of New Testament
narratives that draws its rhetorical power from a stark division between the “people” (i.e.,
the “Jews”) and the “peoples” (i.e., the Gentiles).138 However, the fifth- and sixth-century
compositions are varied in their polemical intensity; Romanos, for example, seems less
interested in vilifying the Jews and more intent on identifying the Church with the
Samaritan Woman and her community. These constructions of Gentile characters serve as
sites for theorizing the relationship of historical Israel to the Christian community, the
implications of Old Testament lineages and kinship, and the legacies of extra-Israelite
identities. These figures also provide ciphers for speaking about religious differences and
arguing for communal unity. Enmeshed within a conceptual matrix of race, ethnicity, and
lineage, late antique poets rehearsed and strengthened the binary between a displaced
Jewish “other” and a Church of the “peoples.” 139 Across the breadth of the canonical and

137 I am sensitive to the fact that positing a distinction between “Christianity” and “Judaism” – especially in
the first four centuries – elides the inter-connected and diverse social and religious phenomena these terms
imply. Indeed, one can speak of multiple “Christianities” and “Judaisms” and employ various paradigms
for their reconstructions. My use of the terms “Christian” and “Jewish” reflects the binary through which
my authors read their Scriptures. As I argue, these terms are being actively constructed within these texts.
139 The applicability of modern categorizations of race and ethnicity has been subject of debate within
Classics and related fields over the last few decades. Some scholars such as Frank Snowden are resistant to
the idea of reading ancient and Christian texts through such a lens. Guy Stroumsa adds that ethnicity is
irrelevant. Denise Buell has pushed against such postures to argue that early Christian texts in particular
employed terms available within their culture to speak of human difference to form their religious tradition
and to depict Christianity as universal and authoritative. Buell argues that inattention to the “ethnic
reasoning” of Christian texts has contributed to perception of Jewish ethnocentrism and particularity as a
binary opposite to Christian universalism.
extra-canonical biblical books, the history of Israel and her neighbors is often portrayed as a continuous struggle to preserve the people of Israel among the peoples. The “ethnoscape” of biblical texts and subsequent interpretation are complex and multilayered “representational histories” of Israel, Canaan, and Samaria. 140

To study the employment of the categories of race and ethnicity requires further reflection on the terms themselves and the worldviews they imply. As Richard H. Thompson warns, such concepts have ethical implications: “Just as cultural worldviews are blueprints for social understanding and social practice, so, too, are theoretical worldviews potential blueprints for social action.” 141 Ethnicity has been variously defined and conceptualized within the fields of sociology and anthropology. The “primordialist” or “essentialist” viewpoints associated with Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz emphasize the stability of ethnic identity through kinship, land, and shared customs. 142 In recent decades a constructivist epistemological approach has rendered ethnicity a more malleable and fluid entity, further specifying “instrumentalist” and “situationalist” usages. 143 This allows our analysis to emphasize the boundaries that are being received

143 Andreas Wimmer, Ethnic Boundary Making: Institutions, Power, Networks. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013. Wimmer’s main concern is to survey the contours of constructivist approaches to the questions of ethnicity whose currency has gained ground since the 1990’s within academic discourse. The antithesis of constructivist views, namely those who seek to reify ethnicity as a characteristic of the
and drawn rather than giving an account of the content of these identities. As Frederik Barth states:

The nature of continuity of ethnic units is clear: it depends on the maintenance of a boundary. The cultural features that signal the boundary may change, and the cultural characteristics of the members may likewise be transformed, indeed, even the organizational form of the group may change – yet the fact of continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders allows us to specify the nature of continuity, investigate the changing cultural form and content.144

For our purposes, this definition allows us to focus on the discursive practices of creating, maintaining, and strategically relinquishing boundaries between “Jews” and gentiles.

Barely limning the “cultural features” that define Canaanite and Samaritan, the biblical authors and later interpreters rely on “idolatry” and aberrant religious practice as a standard gloss of these ethnic terms. Writing centuries later than the composition of the New Testament, late antique authors read these details as a type of “biblical semiotics,” employing the connotations of such terms to produce elaborate representations of these characters.

The construction of boundaries between groups calls attention to the performative nature of such labels. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu, Rogers Brubaker claims membership within an ethnic group is “performative” as individuals reify ethnic groups in the act of naming them: “By invoking groups, they seek to evoke them, summon them, call them into being. Their categories are for doing – designed to stir, summon, justify, mobilize,

social world assigned at birth (“primordialist”) or those who espouse the stability of ethnic cultures and identities over time (“essentialist”) have become minority viewpoints.

kindle, and energize.” To be more specific, the individual may activate particular attributes of a given identity or others might assign such attributes, rendering an ethnic identity’s implications and performance specific to the individual.

Ethnicity, constructed and performed, has provided scholars of early Christianity and Late Antiquity an analytical tool for studying the gradual development of Christian self-fashioning. Scholars have also approached the language of race as equally socially constructed, eschewing common assumptions about the alleged “biological” grounding of race and its immutability. Buell pointedly employs ethnicity and race interchangeably, drawing attention to the “inexactness” of these categories both in the ancient and contemporary contexts. For Buell, Christians engaged in “ethnic reasoning,” namely, “modes of persuasion that may or may not include the use of a specific vocabulary of peoplehood,” presenting their idealized forms of Christian life as universally accessible to all while also allowing them to reify the boundaries of subordinated “others.” I extend her analysis to liturgical poetry to interrogate how Syriac and Greek authors employed “ethnic reasoning” to transform and deploy the biblical vocabulary of peoplehood.

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148 Buell, Why this New Race, 14.
149 Buell, Why this New Race, 2.
historical legacy of specific biblical markers such as Canaanite and Samaritan draws attention to the reception history of biblical texts and their interpretation. We ask how generic terms such as the “nations” and the “peoples” coexisted with specific ethno-religious markers within the late antique “ethnoscape.”

Holding these modern approaches to ethnicity and race in mind, it is possible to handle with greater agility the range of expressions in late antique authors. One must also be alert to the plasticity of both ancient and modern vocabularies for social categories in an effort to cultivate greater care when handling the range of expressions found in ancient authors.\textsuperscript{150} For example, a primary approach to the problem of ethnicity is found in the poetry of Ephrem. His compositions emphasize “the church of (or from) the peoples (or nations).” As Robin Darling Young has argued, Ephrem’s interest in the “scattered peoples” from the time of the Patriarchs to his own day informs his madrāshē and mēmrē and contributes to his idealized portrait of a post-Nicene, unified Church.\textsuperscript{151} Nevertheless, the terminology of “peoples” retains the specter of dissension and heterodoxy, leaving the potential for such rhetoric to be deployed against those within the community. Such a reading of Ephrem dovetails with scholarship that deconstructs and complicates the “Eusebian” model of a unified, apostolic Christian Church coalescing according to a

\textsuperscript{150} Rogers Brubaker, “Ethnicity, Race, Nationalism,” \textit{Annual Review of Sociology} 35 (2009): 21-22. In light of the complexity of providing either a diachronic or a synchronic account of social categorization, the study of ethnicity, race, and gender is a “comparative, global, cross-disciplinary, and multiparadigmatic field” according to Brubaker.

providential design, allowing various modes and strategies of narrating difference to come to the fore.\textsuperscript{152} Citing New Testament passages of the “Gentiles” and nations being gathered into the Christian community rehearses the notion of a single, cohesive community while simultaneously also bringing to mind the assembled and continuously-maintained nature of such an enterprise.\textsuperscript{153}

Late antique readers shared and continually constructed an “ethnographical” sensibility that mapped on to the landscape of ancient Israel. In light of the ministry, death, and resurrection of Christ, Christian self-reflection and theological development involved an ongoing re-evaluation of Israel’s place among the nations, the Church as the “new” Israel, and the status of their Jewish and Gentile contemporaries who did not acknowledge Jesus as the Jewish messiah. As the Christian movement evolved, this ethnographic impulse broadened the scope of the religious imagination to include “heretical” Christians and other religious sects.\textsuperscript{154}

1.7 Structure

In the chapters which follow I undertake a comparative reading of three late ancient poets in light of their historical, theological, and intellectual contexts. Over the course of this study, the constellation of poets and biblical women shifts to bring

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{152} Walter Bauer, \textit{Rechtgläubigkeit und Ketzeri im ältesten Christentum} paved the way for a thorough-going shift in how the early Jesus movement and first three centuries are narrated.
\textsuperscript{153} Young, “The ‘Church from the Nations’ in the Exegesis of Ephrem,” 121.
\textsuperscript{154} Todd Berzon, \textit{Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity} (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016), 28-29. While the poetry examined here does not engage in a full-scale heresiology or ethnography, one can see a comparable tendency to “create a disjuncture between a cultural center and a periphery organized around diverging habits and customs, behaviors and mentalities, and political structures and policies (among other factors).”
\end{footnotesize}
particular themes into focus, but the constituent parts of the project exist in dynamic relationship to one another. Through employing case studies and close readings, I ground this study of late ancient poetry in the diversity of the texts themselves. Narrowing our focus to specific characters and themes not only lends individual chapters coherence, but this narrative strategy also corresponds to the nature of the evidence under examination. Narsai, for instance, dedicates fewer works to female protagonists than does Romanos or Jacob, but his qualitative contribution to this study outstrips the quantity of his relevant poems. I have also dedicated more time to charting the reception history of the Canaanite woman, the Samaritan woman, and the Hemorrhaging woman within this corpus in comparison to the Sinful woman, who has been the subject of numerous articles and studies.\(^{155}\)

While the themes of corporeality, ethnicity, and voice are foregrounded in the first three chapters, they are woven throughout the entire work. Chapter Two attends to poems by Jacob of Serugh and Romanos featuring the Hemorrhaging woman. As I examine the poetic rhetoric around the body, I juxtapose how the two poets employ the discourse of impurity to characterize the bodily condition of the woman. Both poets read the text through the lens of Levitical statutes regulating women’s monthly cycles, but the poets create two very different portraits of this biblical figure. This chapter intervenes in

discussions of purity discourse within early Christian sources through attending to the neglected sources in poetry, a genre that shaped Christian attitudes toward gender and women’s bodies. Jacob’s poetic Hemorrhaging woman emerges as a sympathetic character through voluminous imagined speech, a contrast to the depiction we encounter in Romanos, who raises questions about the woman’s moral status.

Turning to the theme of “ethnic” identity in the third chapter, I examine the reception of the Canaanite woman and the Samaritan woman in all three poets. I query the significance of these markers of identity for Syriac- and Greek-speaking audiences of the period. Through creative reading strategies, Narsai and Jacob extend the significance of ethnic markers. Whereas Narsai creates a genealogical superstructure to construct an elaborate characterization of the Canaanite woman, Jacob finds fodder for his anti-Jewish polemic through mapping the stories of both the Canaanite and Samaritan figures along a binary of the Jewish “People” and the “peoples,” constructing these women as symbols of the diversified “church of the nations.”

Chapter Four turns to the prominence of female voices within the poetry of all three authors on the unnamed New Testament women. The imagery of voices and the theme of both divine and human speech weave throughout these poems. Of central importance for the characterization of women, I argue, is the dramatic use of the female voice, amplified by the expressiveness of the body. I examine the ways that poets simultaneously script emboldened speech acts for these women and curb the dangers these women present to social cohesion. The fifth chapter builds on the insights of chapters two through four by presenting a philological study of the terms of boldness
found throughout these poems. I argue that through ascribing boldness to a diverse range of characters the poets expand the semantic range of terms for audacity to embrace both the negative and the positive valences of this trait.

My final chapter is a brief excursus on the consequences of this poetry for how we understand verse exegesis. Within the confines of poetic performance, the tenacity and boldness of women could be celebrated. I suggest that these poems on unnamed New Testament women demonstrate the flexibility of biblical storytellers to use narration as a form of interpretation. Resisting moments of interpretative closure, our poets explore the multiple dimensions of these texts. I close with a brief conclusion about the outcome of this study and its consequences for the reception history of these biblical narratives as well as the study of late ancient poetry. I further reflect on the findings of my translation and analysis of these poems for Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos in particular as I advance a more integrated understanding of Greek and Syriac literary and interpretative cultures.

At the end of the dissertation are four appendices corresponding to the four biblical women under examination. For the Canaanite woman I have included the edition and translation of Narsai’s heretofore unavailable mēmrā on her story. As I have prepared translations of passages from relevant mēmrē from Jacob of Serugh, I have consulted with the fine English translations now available, and I have included references to these publications in addition to the Syriac text. I have also provided full translations and
diplomatic editions of the Greek text for the relevant kontakia of Romanos. In consultation with the Italian, German, and French editions of the texts, I have annotated my translations and adjudicated between the Oxford and French editions of the Greek.

2. The Poetic Body Unbound: The Hemorrhaging Woman in Late Ancient Poetry

2.1 Introduction

Among the Byzantine artifacts housed at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York is a small hematite amulet from Egypt [Image 2.1].

It bears a depiction of Jesus healing the Hemorrhaging woman as recounted in all three Synoptic Gospels (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48). Inscribed upon its crimson dappled surface is an abbreviated rendition of her story from the Gospel of Mark, recounting her long illness and fruitless search for healing. Late ancient medical experts ascribed healing properties to hematite for ailments of the blood, lending the material medium added significance.


This pendant represents a pre-modern, holistic vision of healing and salvation, a worldview far removed from the post-Enlightenment penchant for distinguishing realms of religious and medical knowledge.\(^5\) The craftsman of this amulet depicted the woman crouching and grasping Jesus’s robe, focusing the viewer’s attention on her bodily movement. Citing similar traits in the iconography of both the Hemorrhaging woman and the Canaanite woman, another female figure at the heart of this study, art historians often suggest caution when offering a definitive identification.\(^6\) Recalling the moment when Jesus assures the woman that her faith has healed her, the figure of Christ stretches forth his hand in a rhetorical gesture for speech.\(^7\) Visual representation serves as a mode of


\(^6\) Myrla Perraymond, “L’emorroissa e la cananea nell’arte paleocristiana,” Bessarione 5 (1986): 147-174. Perraymond offers a full comparison of the patristic exegesis and iconographical depictions of these female figures, suggesting that both are depicted in supplicative postures, but the figure is often confused with the woman who anointed Christ; eadem, “Il miracolo dell’emorroissa nell’arte paleocristiana,” in Sangue e Antropologia Riti e Culto, ed. Francesco Vattioni (Rome: Pia Unione Preziosissimo Sangue, 1987), 1723-1725.

interpretation, isolating episodes within narratives and freezing characters in evocative postures. Representative of the iconographical Nachleben of the Hemorrhaging woman, the amulet reminded the wearer not only of the woman’s bodily suffering through the words etched on its surface, but also her embodied expression of faith through her submissive stance.

healing convey an important image of who Christ was for early Christians: “Far from evoking associations of emperor and official imperial protocol, these images represent a warm, profoundly intimate encounter of the woman with her magical gynecologist. The power of these curing images does not derive from reminiscences of imperial propaganda but from evocations of a profound human vulnerability crying out for succor.”

9 Branislav Cvetković, “The Haemorrhooissa in Eastern Christian Art. A Preliminary Access,” in The Woman with the Blood Flow (Mark 5:24-34): Narrative, Iconic, and Anthropological Spaces, ed. Barbara Baert. Art & Religion 2 (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 172-180. As Cvetković observes, the woman is rarely depicted standing upright. Her posture often renders identification difficult since the Canaanite woman is also shown crouching near Jesus. Within The Ecclesiastical History, Eusebius suggests that the woman came from Caesarea Philippi, and that her story was memorialized there: “there stood on a lofty stone at the gates of her house a bronze figure in relief of a woman, bending on her knee and stretching out her hands resembling one supplicating (ἐπὶ γόνυ κεκλιμένον καὶ τεταμέναις ἐπὶ τὸ πρόσθεν τὰς χερσὶν ἱκανοῦση ἐοικός). The Greek text may be found in G. Bardy, Eusèbe de Césarée. Histoire ecclé siastique, Sources Chrétien nnes 41 (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1955), 2.192.2; also Ecclesiastical History 7.18 (LCL 174-175).
Moving from Egypt to Constantinople in the north and to Edessa and Nisibis toward the northeast, we encounter verbal images of the Hemorrhaging woman along with other biblical characters within the corpora of poets such as Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos Melodos. Poets imagined female figures speaking, moving, and *physically* striving in the pursuit of holiness as their bodies expressed their desire for the divine.\(^\text{10}\) In

\(^{10}\) Averil Cameron, “Desire in Byzantium – the Ought and the Is,” in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 208-209. According to Cameron, Byzantine literature seldom attends to subjects such as desire and the realities of human love, privileging the saint (and the ascetic body) as the “organizing figure” for desire. A rhetoric of the “spectacle” of holiness infused ascetic discourse, “configured round the notion of the saint or ascetic, rising above the body through desire and amid pain and suffering.” As we shall see, desire animated not only the ascetic practices of saintly figures but also biblical figures in their pursuit of holiness, rendering them “forerunners” of faith. See also, Charles Barber, “Memory, Desire and the Holy in Iconoclasm,” in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium: Papers from the Thirty-first Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, University of Sussex, Brighton, March 1997*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 115. Within this same collection of essays, Barber attends to debates around the visual (as well as textual) representation of holiness, specifically with regards to icons. His observation concerning the iconophile defense of icons seems especially apt to the present discussion:
their hands the thin biblical “memory” acquired added density; familiar characters possessed personal histories and their bodies physicality. Our authors inscribed textual, poetic bodies with spiritual ideals, but their representations of women also bear the imprint of gendered rhetoric and assumptions about normative behavior.\textsuperscript{11} These compositions allow historians to hear various Christian discourses in a different key, especially those discourses that coalesce around the body.\textsuperscript{12} Through integrating poetry into our canon of historical sources, we extend our perspective beyond more familiar genres of biblical commentaries and theological treatises to encompass cultural productions accessible to believers from diverse social locations.\textsuperscript{13}

This amulet forms the starting point for the present investigation for two reasons: first, it serves as a reminder that biblical stories were interwoven with textual and material bodies in late antique and early Byzantine Christianity.\textsuperscript{14} Reflecting the cultural

\textsuperscript{11} Thomas J. Csordas, “Somatic Modes of Attention,” \textit{Cultural Anthropology} 8, no. 2 (1993): 135-156. This Foucauldian reliance on textual metaphors has been criticized for its “representational bias.” As Csordas notes, representationalism risks rendering the body as a “function of knowledge and thought.” He suggests a more expansive approach: “This critique should not be construed as negating the study of signs with respect to the body, but as making a place for a complementary appreciation of embodiment and being in the world alongside textuality and representation” (137).

\textsuperscript{12} As outlined in the introduction, my work takes up an understanding of discourse dependent on the work of Michel Foucault, in particular his early writings such as “The Order of Discourse,” in \textit{Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader}, ed. Robert Young (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), 48-78.


\textsuperscript{14} This amulet is not a lone example. Another Byzantine amulet bearing a similar image of Christ with the Hemorrhaging woman is housed at the Benaki Museum in Athens and also dated to the sixth to seventh century. It is made from green jasper, another material credited with powers for healing blood-related disorders. For the only published discussion of the piece, see Demetra Papanikola-Bakirtzi, ed. \textit{Everyday Life in Byzantium} (Athens: Kapon Editions, 2002), 485.
diffusion of medico-religious knowledge, the wearers of this amulet sustained their hope for physical well-being through remembering the story of this biblical woman, and perhaps they found in her a model of faith as well.\textsuperscript{15} Evidence from late antique sermons shows that some church leaders vehemently opposed the continued popularity of amulets and incantations among Christian believers.\textsuperscript{16} For those suffering from bodily ailments, however, the desire for relief overshadowed demands for religious orthodoxy. In both material culture and literature, miracle stories appear frequently.\textsuperscript{17} The iconographical record for the Hemorrhaging woman attests to the prevalence of her story within the visual culture of early Christians.\textsuperscript{18} Depicted in the catacombs and among the narrative

\textsuperscript{15} Jacqueline Tuerk, “An Early Byzantine Inscribed Amulet and its Narratives,” 37. Here Tuerk approaches religion as offering a model for understanding the world, a concept originally advanced by Clifford Geertz, “Religion as a Cultural System,” in \textit{Interpretation of Cultures} (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 93-94. For an overview of approaches to the somewhat nebulous term, “culture,” see Dale Martin, “Introduction, in \textit{Cultural Turn}, ed. Dale Martin and Patricia Cox Miller, 6-9. Rather than speak of a “high” or “low” culture, I use “culture” to refer to the quotidian realities which reflect the normative values and ideals of the texts under investigation here. Given the gender of the biblical characters and the links between hematite and feminine ailments in Greek medical literature, one might surmise (as Tuerk does) that a woman was the probable owner of this pendant.


programs of sarcophagi, this biblical figure symbolized the healing potential of faith, expressed in a mere touch of Jesus’s robe. Gospel narratives of healing were reimagined within the early centuries of the Christian movement in a variety of genres and across linguistic boundaries, perpetuating the ubiquitous image of Christ the physician. Over the course of Late Antiquity the ascent of Christianity to political power was accompanied by the building of hospitals, especially in the eastern Mediterranean where Constantinople, Edessa, Antioch, and most significantly Nisibis became centers for medical knowledge by the sixth century and beyond. Within discursive practices and

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20 Scholarship on depictions of Christ as healer is abundant. One important point of departure was Adolf von Harnack’s suggestion that Asclepius was an important model for the image of Christ in the early centuries in Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1906), which was quickly translated into English as The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries, trans. James Moffatt (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), 102: “Nor is any bodily disease too loathsome for Jesus. In this world of wailing, misery, filth, and profligacy, which pressed upon him every day, he kept himself invariably vital, pure, and busy.” For further discussion see Lee M. Jefferson, Christ the Miracle Worker in Early Christian Art (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2014), esp. 37-53; Erich Dinkler, Christus und Asklepios (Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980); Giovanni Battista Bazzana, “Early Christian Missionaries as Physicians: Healing and its Cultural Value in the Greco-Roman Context,” Novum Testamentum 51 (2009): 232-251. Bazzana demonstrates how the portrayal of early Christian missionaries as itinerant physicians, a parallel to the “wandering philosopher,” was a catalyst for the spread of the Christian message.

daily life, illness and physical suffering were ever-present to the Christian imagination as endemic to embodied existence and integral to the role of the church in society.22

In addition to drawing together textual and material evidence for discourses around healing, this amulet also draws our eyes and attention to the woman’s crouching posture as representative of the iconographical reception of her story. The Hemorrhaging woman possesses knowledge of suffering and healing in her body. Reflecting this intimate knowledge of divine beneficence, the image of her kneeling at Jesus’s side expresses a receptive form of religious subjectivity before the divine. The body of this woman formed a critical part of her Nachleben within eastern Christian poetry, but her bodily condition was transformed through the attribution of imagined speech. Composing for the worshipping community and the classroom, late antique Syriac and Greek writers developed a poetic rhetoric rife with corporeal images, underscoring the role of the body in Christian thought and practice. In their narratives, our poets expanded the biblical past to embrace the present moment; as a result their works sanctioned and naturalized particular values.23 As active participants in the construction and perpetuation of

22 Cameron, “Desire in Byzantium – the Ought and the Is,” 205-207. Byzantine Christians, Cameron observes, paid greatest attention to ascetic and sick bodies; the pleasures of the body received scant attention. She further cautions that miracle stories from early Byzantium offer little information about medical practices: “Perhaps the Byzantines were more interested in the body as the locus for spiritual precepts, or for a theological anthropology, than as a real living organism subject to growth and decay.” As Andrew Crislip has demonstrated, ascetics developed a multifaceted approach to illness, often acknowledging its ability to both nourish and vitiate the practices of physical renunciation (Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

23 Elizabeth A. Clark, “Ideology, History, and the Construction of ‘Woman’ in Late Ancient Christianity,” Journal of Early Christian Studies 2, no. 2 (1994): 156-163. Clark charts how the concept of “ideology” has been variously construed from the purely illusory understanding found in Karl Marx through later models that emphasize the role of “superstructural apparatuses as law, education, and religion” (158). For
Christian discourses, Syriac and Greek poets instructed Christians from all social locations and inculcated patterns of ethical reasoning through a biblical idiom. In this examination of verse exegesis of unnamed New Testament women, I argue that these poets invoke female corporeality as paradigmatic of how the bodily condition is a challenge overcome through repentance, healing, and spiritual illumination.

Attending to poetic narrations of the Hemorrhaging woman’s encounter with Christ shifts our attention away from the idealized virginal body of Mary. The present treatment approaches the Hemorrhaging woman as a particularly intensive site within the larger discourse of gender and sexuality, particularly in respect to women whose bodies were deemed problematic. The ideal of the virginal female body is diffuse within early Christian literature, holding a prominent place within Syriac and Greek poetry through hymnography on Mary, the mother of Jesus, as well as on Christ’s virginal body. The bodies of the unnamed New Testament women may be sexualized in the case of the feminist analysis of early Christian texts, Fredric Jameson’s conception of ideologies as proffering “strategies of containment” has proven particularly fruitful (The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981], 52-53). Clark directs her analysis towards early Christian writings which convey the ideological construction of the ideal “woman” through naturalizing, universalizing, and stereotyping. These strategies, used in tandem, contribute to the scripting of “submissive” feminine behavior. This formulation does not map neatly onto the poetry at hand which is not directed solely at women. Furthermore, these poetic re-narrations construct female characters as subverting social norms. The “strategies of containment” are therefore more subtle; poets commend the value of religious zeal while curtailing the particularly gendered connotations of their actions. While Clark points to moments where early Christian women may have partially “subverted” gender ideologies, poetry may represent a body of male-authored writings harboring conflicting messages about gender ideology.

In assessing the audience and reach of Christian writings about the body, genre is an important consideration. Ascetic treatises, commentaries, and epistolary exchanges circulated among ecclesial elites and literary networks, but poetry (like homilies) translated theological reflection for mixed audiences. While poetry reached non-elite audiences, it would be a mistake to understand poets as popularizers of Christian theological and doctrinal development. Simultaneously biblical interpreters, theologians, and church leaders, poets were multifaceted artists and thinkers.
Samaritan woman and the Sinful woman, but the Hemorrhaging woman also calls attention to the way that the body – even the female body – is not coextensive with sexuality but exceeds it. This chapter undertakes close readings of Romanos’s and Jacob’s receptions of the Hemorrhaging woman with an emphasis on how her “poetic” personas articulate her ailment and inner deliberations. For both poets, the woman is acutely aware of the social stigmatization incurred by her bodily state, understood in the context of variously articulated notions of bodily purity. Through the embodied speeches attributed to this biblical woman (as well as others), I contend that Romanos and Jacob underscore the suffering of the sinful self and script faithful self-assertion.

Poetry, in contrast to iconography and the homiletic tradition, transforms the almost wordless encounter of the Hemorrhaging woman and Christ through the addition of embellished speech. As the poetic persona of this woman acquires verbal dexterity, this character displays her latent tenacity, forming a heretofore underappreciated interpretative trajectory. We will begin with Romanos’s more streamlined treatment of her narrative as he imagines her addressing an all-male crowd who threaten to block her path to Jesus. In contrast, Jacob’s lengthier rendition will foreground the woman’s prior

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26 While Narsai does not treat the narrative of the Hemorrhaging woman within his extant poetry, his discussion of Eve’s body as an instrument for evil and his attribution of “defilement” to other New Testament women will inform my discussion in subsequent chapters.
27 In his introduction to this kontakion, the French editor, J. Grosdidier de Matons, surmises that the central exegetical knot for Romanos to untangle is the woman’s stony silence. He compares the poetic portrayal of the Hemorrhaging woman to the comparatively loquacious leper found elsewhere in Romanos’s hymns. See Romanos le Mélode, Hymnes, ed. and trans. J. Grosdidier de Matons, 5 vols., Sources Chrétienes 99, 110, 114, 128, 283 (Paris: Cerf, 1964-1981), II.81-82.
medical history and intense bodily suffering. While both authors assume the woman is “unclean” due to her uncontrollable loss of blood, Jacob offers an extended meditation in the woman’s own voice about her suffering as well as a reflection on the scope and application of the Levitical laws regarding purity.

Both poetic women challenge the restrictions placed upon them, but each poet scripts his arguments in distinctive ways with relationship to biblical texts regarding purity. By crafting the Hemorrhaging woman as a model penitent and eliding the moral and ritual registers of purity language, Romanos creates a less sympathetic portrait of the suffering woman. Through emphasizing the *symbolic* significance of her bodily condition, Romanos shifts attention away from her embodied suffering.

In contrast, Jacob’s multifaceted treatment dedicates sustained attention to the physical and emotional pain the woman endures, amplifying her extraordinary faith. Through a comparative reading of these poems, we can better appreciate the malleability of this figure in the hands of poets. Jacob and Romanos render the suffering gendered body with different degrees of sympathy and naturalism, resulting in distinct portraits of the woman’s extraordinary boldness. Not only does her story serve as a particularly intensive site for larger cultural discourses of gender and impurity, these understudied poems display highly imaginative receptions of the biblical text.

### 2.2 Poetry and Purity: A Case Study of the Hemorrhaging Woman

The body within late antique poetry is a topic beyond the scope of a single chapter. As an initial foray into themes I will pursue in subsequent chapters, I focus here
on how two poets enrich the reception history of a single biblical narrative which centralizes the gendered body. The present chapter highlights how these poets received and deployed the concepts of defilement and impurity in their narrations of biblical stories. In the case of healing narratives, the poets rendered the body a symbolic marker of spiritual degradation and rehabilitation. How did poetry promulgate views of the female body inflected by notions of impurity? What rhetorical techniques focused the listener’s attention on the poetic body? These questions will guide my inquiry into the writings of Jacob of Serugh and Romanos Melodos.

2.2.1 Purity and Impurity Discourse

The description of the woman’s bodily condition is a critical aspect of these poets’ interpretations.28 The Gospel writers’ silence on the specific nature of her ailment and the woman’s reticence have led many early and modern interpreters to assume her ailment is gender specific, namely excessive menstruation.29 The female body materialized the revelation of Jesus’s salvific ministry for later interpreters, and they assumed that this woman’s encounter was a commentary on pre-existing discourses around purity and the place of women within the community. Contemporary New

28 Cf. John J. Pilch, “Improving Bible Translations: The Example of Sickness and Healing,” *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 30, no. 4 (2000): 129-134. Drawing on the insights of medical anthropology, Pilch counsels translators to avoid modern explanatory categories (such as diagnosing a “disease” from narrative details). Terms like “illness” and “healing” capture “human (in contrast to biomedical) perception, experience and interpretation of certain socially disvalued states including but not limited to disease” (130).

29 Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, The Anchor Bible 27 (New York: Doubleday, 2000) 356-360. According to Marcus, if the woman’s bleeding had been non-vaginal, “Mark would not have been so shy about specifying its location” (357). He further specifies that the wording, “the fountain of her blood” (5:29) enjoys a close link to Levitical statutes (cf. Lev 12:7; 15:19-33; 20:18) concerning the ritual uncleanness of the menstruant (*niddâ*) as well as the prescriptions regarding women with other types of discharge (*zābâ* or “oozer”).
Testament scholars are divided over how to understand her condition. For example, E.P. Sanders has averred that the wording of Mark 5:28 and 5:34 frames the narrative in terms of illness not impurity, leading him to conclude that “the passage tells us nothing about Jesus’s views of purity and impurity.”30 In contrast, John J. Pilch assumes the woman’s impurity and the contagion of impurity transferred through touch.31 These latter preconceptions have led interpreters to draw intertextual links to the purity regulations detailed in biblical texts such as Leviticus 15:19-32. For both ancient and modern interpreters, the discourse of purity provides an exegetical frame that forecloses certain interpretative possibilities and variously determines the shape of resulting readings.

The discourse of purity and impurity invites interdisciplinary approaches to the biblical text. Within the field of anthropology, the study of purity and pollution has been richly theorized. The landmark work of Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of the Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, originally published in 1966, provided a structuralist anthropological framework for understanding the precepts and cosmological vision of a text such as Leviticus. While Douglas has qualified her statements in subsequent editions, her approach to systems and rituals of purity calls attention to the

31 John J. Pilch, *Healing in the New Testament: Insights from Medical and Mediterranean Anthropology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 111: “The woman with the uncontrollable flow of blood (Luke 8:42-48), who touched Jesus’s garment in the hope of healing, was herself considered impure, and by touching Jesus rendered him impure as well. Jesus remedied her condition and restored her to purity, wholeness, and holiness, but he obviously did not consider himself adversely affected by her touch.” Roland W. Moser concurs, drawing on the narrative details regarding the length of the woman’s illness. See his discussion of the woman’s state in *Jesus Christus, der Arzt: Krankheit und Heilung in der Bibel* (Freiburg: Paulusverlag, 2012), 83-88.
body – especially the bodily “margins” or orifices – as bearing symbolic weight. This symbolic weight allows “powers and dangers credited to social structure [to be] reproduced in small on the human body.”

From an anthropological angle, taboos around blood and female fertility appear throughout ancient and modern cultures, inviting speculation about the function of purity for the social order. Mary Douglas presented a positive account of how rituals around purity and impurity create “unity in experience”; communal standards around purity impose systematic ordering on what is considered out of place, controlling ambiguity. This “intellectualist” account shifts emphasis away from the objects perceived as polluting to the patterns of thought that render them revolting.

For Douglas, the symbolic order carries authority, linking the individual with the social and cosmic order:

To sum up, a primitive world view looks out on a universe which is personal in several different senses. Physical forces are thought of as interwoven with the lives of persons. Things are not completely distinguished from persons and personas are not completely distinguished from their external environment. The universe responds to speech and mime. It discerns the social order and intervenes to uphold it.

Douglas has revised her schematic rendering of Leviticus, and subsequent studies call for greater attention to the nuances of the biblical text. While this model offers a clear spatial and schematic rendering of biblical notions of purity, the biblical texts themselves reveal a variegated approach. Despite the need for greater nuance, Douglas’s model offers modern scholars valuable insights into the symbolic weight of the human body for structuring human society.

In addition to anthropological approaches, interpreters of biblical literature have taken an intertextual approach to the Gospel passages recounting the story of the Hemorrhaging woman. Interpreters of the New Testament frequently look to the passages concerning purity within Leviticus as the immediate context for this Gospel narrative. Although correspondences in vocabulary prompt intertextual reading practices, widespread notions of taboos and anxieties about the pollution of menstrual bleeding are found throughout the larger Mesopotamian and Mediterranean region. The larger Mediterranean world provides evidence for a variety of attitudes toward the female body

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36 Valerio Valeri has more recently critiqued Douglas’s model to account for greater diversity across cultures and to provide a more relational conception of purity in The Forest of Taboos: Morality, Hunting, and Identity among the Huaulu of the Moluccas (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2000), 70-73.

37 Saul M. Olyan, Rites and Rank: Hierarchy in Biblical Representation of Cult (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 40: “Modern scholars have proffered explanations, though none of these is completely convincing. Extant evidence suggests that there were a variety of purity constructions in ancient Israel, not one alone; these differ somewhat with respect to which agents cause defilement, the purification procedures required for its removal, and the locus of the polluted individual before purity is restored.”

38 Olyan, Rites and Rank, 43-44. According to Olyan, biblical texts view menstruation and parturition as “severely polluting,” but he stresses that different sources (such as the Priestly Writers and the Holiness Code) display different degrees of specificity. See also Karel van der Toorn, Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia: A Comparative Study (Assen, Netherlands: Van Gorcum, 1985), 31-32; for an overview of alternative approaches see Ariel W. Zwiep, “Jairus, His Daughter and the Haemorrhaging Woman (Mk 5.21-43; Mt. 9.18-26; Lk. 8.40-56): Research Survey of a Gospel Story about People in Distress,” Currents in Biblical Research 13, no. 3 (2015): 357-358.
and its biological cycles. Rather than interpreting the pericope in light of Leviticus alone, later readers approached the story of the bleeding woman with interlocking and competing assumptions about the human body and sacred space. For example, inscriptions found in the town of Thuburbo Maius from the second century CE regarding visitors to the temple of Asclepius contain gender-specific prescribed ritual cleansing and counseled sexual continence for worshippers. Without eliding religious and geographical differences, it is clear that anxiety attended the bodily cycles of women throughout the ancient world.

Within classical Greek literature one rarely finds reference to menstruation outside of medical texts, evidence according to Robert Parker that “[p]ossibly it was a fact so secret and shaming that it could not be alluded to at all, even to the extent of requiring purity from it in a sacred law. It is, certainly, almost the only bodily function which Old Comedy never mentions.” In addition to medical literature, the statements of Pliny the Elder in his *Natural History* demonstrate the special powers associated with bleeding for good or ill, especially within agricultural contexts. When reading the fifth-

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39 Marc Kleijwegt, “Beans, Baths and the Barber….A Sacred Law from Thuburbo Maius,” *Antiquités africaines* 30 (1994): 212-213. Although Kleijwegt cites parallels in biblical texts for certain dietary restrictions, he warns that these are only parallels without clear implications for determining causation.


41 Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, II.7.54 (LCL 352.548-549): “But nothing could easily be found that is stranger than the flux of women. Contact with it turns new wine sour, crops touched by it become barren, grafts die, seeds in gardens are dried up, the fruit of trees falls off, the bright surface of mirrors in which it is merely
and sixth-century literary evidence one must keep in mind how diffuse Greco-Roman conceptions intermingled with and informed Christian readings of biblical purity regulations.

Modern interpreters mirror their ancient counterparts in placing exegetical weight on the nature of her illness. 42 Interpreters underscore the woman’s marginal status as one unclean and dramatize the encounter between the unclean woman and Jesus. A critical question for commentators is the degree to which Levitical purity statutes (and purity regulations more broadly understood) inform one’s reading of the text. 43 Leviticus 15:19-33 addresses specifically the bodies of women, establishing procedures for both regular and irregular patterns of menstruation such as excessive bleeding. The social implications of purity regulations for women has been debated within scholarship. According to Shaye Cohen, Leviticus justifies avoidance and isolation of women because of their impurity (and hence danger to the pure) and establishes regulations prohibiting sexual intercourse reflected is dimmed, the edge of steal and the gleam of ivory are dulled, hives of bees die, even bronze and iron are at once seized by rust, and a horrible smell fills the air; to taste it drives dogs mad and infects their bites with an incurable poison” (sed nihil facile reperiatur mulierum profluvio magis monstrificum. Acescunt supervenitu musta, sterilescunt contactae fruges, moriuntur insita, exuruntur hortorum germina, fructus arborum [quibus insider] decidunt, speculorum fulgor adspectu ipso hebetatur, acies ferri praestringitur, eboris nitor, alvi apium moriuntur, aes etiam ac ferrigro protinus corripit odorque dirus aera, in rabiem aguntur gustato eo canes atque insanabili veneno morsus inficitur) [trans. alt.]. For a fuller discussion see Parker, Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion, 101-104 and Jack J. Lennon, Pollution and Religion in Ancient Rome (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 83-85.

42 It is quite often to see commentators assume the importance of purity for this narrative. For example, W.F. Albright and C.S. Mann, Matthew, The Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company, 1971), 111; François Bovon, A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 1:1-9:50, trans. Christine M. Thomas and ed. Helmut Koester (Minneapolis: Fortress, Press, 2002), 337-338: “It may suffice simply to mention the structure of purity and impurity is a hermeneutical aid.”

with a menstruant. Despite these justifications, Cohen cites a lack of evidence for widespread seclusion: “For most Jews of the second temple period the locus of God’s presence was the temple and the temple mount, and as long as those affected with impurity stayed away from the sacred precincts Jewish society did not care about their impurity.” Both biblical and later interpretation may project a vision of idealized compliance to strictures that would not necessarily reflect the practices of most women in Jesus’s time.

Reading across the canonical texts of the New Testament against the background of Second Temple Jewish authors, Jonathan Klawans pinpoints a key category error often found in discussions of purity in the New Testament: a failure to differentiate ritual and moral impurity. Among the consequences pertinent to understanding the New Testament text at hand, Klawans attends to the question of sin and the contagion of impurity:

It is not uncommon to stumble across statements that sinners were considered impure and that, by extension, those who associated with sinners were violating norms of purity. There are actually two errors in such assumptions. The first error is the assumption that sinners were ritually impure. The second is that it is prohibited for Israelites to contract ritual impurity. As I have argued, Israelites are almost always permitted to become ritually impure, and it is often obligatory to do so. Thus even if sinners were considered to be a source of ritual defilement, contact between the righteous and sinners would not necessarily violate norms of ritual purity.

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While Klawans’s statements are of critical importance for understanding the biblical texts themselves, they also clarify how Christians over the centuries redeployed the language of purity without such distinctions. In her study of Paul on intermarriage, Christine Hayes advanced Klawans’s insights through articulating a Pauline concept of “carnal impurity”: “A defilement of flesh by immorality that is transferred to other flesh with which it is sexually united.” For both Hayes and Klawans, Christians received and applied the discourse of impurity in morally inflected ways. Bearing Hayes’ concept of “carnal impurity” in mind, we may attend with greater clarity to how Romanos and Jacob present the nature of the woman’s impurity in relationship to sin and ritual purity.

2.2.2 Purity in the New Testament and Early Christian Texts

An examination of the New Testament sources illuminate how early Christians built upon the biblical wording as they composed their characterizations of this woman and her bodily ailment. The healing of the woman suffering from a flow of blood is recounted in all three of the Synoptic Gospels (Mt 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-48) with varied points of emphasis.

Matthew’s shorter account displays an economical use of words and spares any details about the woman’s visits with doctors. Luke “softens” the statement in Mark that the doctors had treated the woman to no avail. Modern feminist

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readings have received criticism for their reliance on a legalistic, monolithic depiction of Judaism. The Jesus that emerges from these readings stands as a liberator of oppressed women from the strictures of purity regulations. Early Christian and modern feminist readings share superficial similarities; Jesus not only heals the woman but moreover restores her to the social community, seemingly relativizing forces of exclusion. Ancient authors display a great deal of exegetical creativity within this overall framework, often emphasizing the dialectic between hiddenness and revelation. As we shall see for Ephrem and his literary heirs, the woman’s body makes visible the power and presence of the divine.

A comparison of Greek and Syriac poetry also draws attention to the issues of biblical translation. Whereas Matthew (9:20) describes her as a woman losing blood (Gr. γυνὴ αἵμορροοῦσα), both Mark (5:25) and Luke (8:43) describe her as literally having an “issue” or “flow” of blood (γυνὴ οὖσα ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος). The Syriac translation of Matthew renders the present active participle of αἵμορροέω (“to lose blood”) with the phrase “whose blood flowed (or was flowing)” (ܕܪܕܐܗܘܐܕܡܗ). The Syriac translations of Mark and Luke slow slight variations. In Luke 8:43, the Syriac uses a different root

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on physicians” is omitted in some reliable manuscripts. Luke was traditionally held to be a physician, but Fitzmyer suggests that this phrase relates the woman’s “desperation” rather than a clear critique of doctors. Katharina von Kellenbach, Anti-Judaism in Feminist Religious Writings (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994), 58-60; Charlotte Elisha Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity: Rabbinic and Christian Reconstructions of Biblical Gender (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 189: “By passing judgment on the suffering and oppression of the woman in this particular narrative and by implication on Jewish traditions surrounding menstruation, such hermeneutic approaches also pass a judgment on Jewish women who choose to observe menstrual separation as a part of living their Jewishly defined lives today. The woman in the story becomes the emblematic Jewish woman whom Jesus comes to heal and liberate.”

(ܬܪܥ) for flowing: “a woman whose blood had broken through” (ܕܬܪܝܥܚܕܐܕܝܢܐܢܬܬܐܗܘܐܕܡܗ). In Mark the translator carefully renders the Greek οὖσα ἐν ρύσει αἵματος with the Syriac ܕܐܝܬܝܗܐܘܬܒܡܪܕܝܬܐܕܕܡܐ. This term for “flow” (Gr. ρύσις, Syr. ܪܕܐ) appears also in Luke 8:44, which repeats the reference to her “flow of her blood” (ἡ ρύσις τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς), which the Syriac translates with a phrase typical of menstruation: ܕܕܡܗܡܪܕܝܬܐ. The Greek vocabulary for Mark and Luke has close parallels with the Septuagint Greek of Leviticus 15, which contains purity guidelines for various types of emissions. The Peshitta uses the verb ܡܪܕܝܬܐ “to flow or issue” for all three accounts. Mk 5:29 recounts the healing of the woman: “And immediately the fountain of her blood dried up” (καὶ εὐθὺς ἐξηράνθη ἡ πηγὴ τοῦ αἵματος αὐτῆς) which the Syriac renders “and immediately the fountain of her blood dried up” ܕܕܡܗܡܥܝܢܐܝܒܫܬܘܡܚܕܐ. In Romanos’s

52 The Didascalia will also use the term ܪܕܐ.
53 Marcus, Mark 1-8, 357. For example: Lev 15:19 reads “And a woman, who is flowing with blood, her flow will be in her body; for seven days she will be in her menses. Anyone touching her will be unclean until evening” (Kai γυνή, ἥτις ἐὰν ᾖ ῥέουσα αἵματι, ἔσται ἡ ρύσις αὐτῆς ἐν τῷ σώματι αὐτῆς, ἑπτὰ ἡμέρας ἐσται ἐν τῇ ἀφέδρῳ αὐτῆς; πᾶς ὁ ἁπτόμενος αὐτῆς ἀκάθαρτος ἔσται ἕως ἑσπέρας). The Hebrew of Lev 15:19 for the flow reads אישה כי-תהיה זבה דם יהיה בברשה שבעת ימים תהיה בנדתה וכל-הנגע בה יטמא עד ועוף הייטב נברשה שם היא בברשה אשה בן שמונים יוםğ warranties הב מטמא-תקוע-עד-몇ו. Within his analysis of Leviticus, Jacob Milgrom suggests several parallels with Israel’s neighbors in Leviticus 1-16: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary (New York: Doubleday, 1991), 934-936, 949-953. In his comment on 15:33, Milgrom specifies that the term zābâ is used for both men and women but can be understood as a technical term for women’s chronic flux. One can see the Syriac mirrors the Hebrew: ܐܢܬܬܐܟܕܬܗܘܐܕܝܒܐܡܢܕܡܗܢܗܘܐܕܘܒܗܒܒܣܪܗܘܫܒܥܐܝܢ̈ܝܘܡܬܬܒܒܟܦܣܗܘܟܠܕܢܩܪܘܒܠܗܢܗܘܐܛܡܐܥܕܡܐܠܪܡܫܐ where the Hebrew term for menstruant niddâ (נדה) is equivalent with the Syriac term ܟܦܣܐ and the Greek ἄφεδρος. The Gospel writer does not use these terms to specify the nature of the woman’s bleeding, but the vocabulary of “flow” or “flux” (Heb. זבה; Gr. ρύσις; Syr. ܪܕܐ) creates a lexical link between the text of Leviticus and the Gospels. It would seem that the irregularity of this woman’s bleeding would relegate her to the fourth category of impurity identified in Leviticus 15, rendering her impure for the duration of her bleeding as well as an additional seven days. See Shaye Cohen, “Menstruants and the Sacred in Judaism and Christianity,” 274-275.
54 Wilhelm Michaelis, “πηγῆ,” TDNT 6:116. This terminology of a fountain or spring (Gr. πηγῆ; Syr.ܡܥܝܢܐ) appears less seldom in Jacob’s poem on her narrative. This word also appears in Jn 4:14 with reference to the woman of Samaria, a lexical link Romanos will reference as he links the two narratives.
kontakion the Hemorrhaging woman will reverse this vocabulary to describe Jesus as “the spring [which] gushes forth streams for all,” transforming her bodily dysfunction into a metaphor for divine superabundance. Some modern New Testament interpreters resist reading the narrative through the lens of Leviticus, but for early Christian readers, the combination of the protagonist’s gender and the presence of blood immediately raised issues of purity.

Over the course of Late Antiquity, Christian and Jewish authors continually forged boundaries and fashioned communal identities. Blood, variously conceived and regulated, offers a means of resisting the “discursive disembodiment” of identity construction. The Didascalia Apostolorum, a church order originating in third-century Syria, provides an invaluable witness to how Church leaders handled controversies over practice within their communities. According to the author of the Didascalia, Christians who had recently converted from Judaism persisted in two practices: keeping the Sabbath and observing menstrual separation. The author of the Didascalia marshals the story of the Hemorrhaging woman as the denouement of his argument that the New Testament renders such regulations and practices inoperative. For early Christian interpreters like

56 Annette Yoshiko Reed, Jewish-Christianity and the History of Judaism, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 171 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 67. Reed also includes the ritual use of water within her discussion; see also Ra’an An S. Boustan and Annette Yoshiko Reed, “Introduction to Theme-Issue: Blood and the boundaries of Jewish and Christian Identities in Late Antiquity,” Henoch 30, no. 2 (2008): 229-242.
58 Didascalia Apostolorum 179.262; 180.244; Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity, 187-188.
the author of the *Didascalia*, the hermeneutical key of this New Testament pericope lay in the nature of the woman’s ailment.⁵⁹

The *Didascalia* stands out among early Christian resources for its explicit discussion of ritual practices around women’s bodily cycles. The emphasis on virginity among early Christian authors obscures their relative silence on issues around menstruation.⁶⁰ Peter Brown construes this inattention as a symptomatic of a larger shift in late antique approaches to corporeality: “But these mercifully precise taboos had been swamped by a general sense that intercourse in itself (and not merely the formless products of the human body, blood, and semen) excluded the Holy Spirit.”⁶¹ While attention to purity discourse in early Christian authors has focused on the church orders, interpretations of Leviticus, and ecclesiastical pronouncements, poetry has been largely ignored.⁶² Through explicating and dramatizing this particular New Testament narrative, our poets conveyed to their audiences a view of female corporeality which attributed symbolic meaning to a biological experience inescapable for women within their

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audiences. While questions remained about the presence of menstruating women within churches in some areas of the Christian world, poets vividly described the body and experience of this woman. Read against the historical context of the fifth and sixth centuries, this poetry contributes to a larger discussion of both Eastern (and Western) Christianity concerning the participation of women within the liturgy and expectations about a woman’s bodily (im)purity throughout the course of her life. The emphasis commentators and poets placed on conceptions of impurity within the reception history of the Hemorrhaging woman are relevant for how Christians conceived the female body.

2.3 The Afflicted Woman in Romanos Melodos

Accounts of the early reception of this story have frequently highlighted centrality of the woman’s bodily condition to the understanding and application of its narrative features. Early commentators frequently employ the text of Leviticus to assess the woman’s impurity. Blood becomes a bodily metaphor for sin, often described within the poem through the vocabulary of (im)purity. In contrast to the efforts of modern commentators to disrupt assumptions about the nature of the woman’s bleeding, Romanos interprets her bodily condition through the matrix of defilement and carnal impurity, rendering his identification with her at the outset of his poem remarkable. The poet’s identity proves fluid as he assumes the characteristics of the biblical protagonist at

63 The Hemorrhaging woman has been the subject of two monographs and countless articles. Especially relevant are Marla J. Selvidge, Woman, Cult, and Miracle Recital: A Redactional Critical Investigation on Mark 5:24-34 (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1990); Peter Trummer, Die blutende Frau: Wunderheilung im Neuen Testament (Wien: Herder, 1991).

64 Selvidge, Woman, Cult, and Miracle Recital, 17-22. Selvidge focuses exclusively on the reception of this text within Latin and Greek authors.
hand. Within this prooimion, however, Romanos simply foreshadows the bodily element which will weave throughout the following strophes. While Jacob highlights the accounts of Luke and Mark in his comparison of Jesus with the unsuccessful doctors, Romanos uses the vocabulary of Matthew. Blending the elements of all three biblical sources, Jacob and Romanos add psychological depth and emotional color to their narrations of the encounter through speech as well as poetic narration.

The language of purity and impurity appears within the following verse as Romanos draws a firm and continuous contrast between the purity of Christ and impurity of the woman.

Ἀφθαρσίας ποσὶν γῆς ἐπέβης νῦν πᾶσι καταμερίζων ιάματα· πήρος γάρ ἐδωρήσεις ἀνάβλεψιν, παρεμένοις δὲ ἔδωκες σύσφιγξιν χειρὶ καὶ λόγῳ, μόνῳ θελήματι· οὕτως οὖν ἐπακούσασα ἡ αἵμορρους σοί προσήλθε σωθῆναι, σιγῶσα φωνῇ, τῇ παλάμῃ δὲ κράζουσι σοι ἐκτενῶς· |: “Σῶτερ, σῶσον με.”:

You set your immortal feet upon the earth, distributing remedies to all; to the blind you gave sight, upon the paralyzed you bestowed strength by your hand, and word, (and) will alone; having heard such things the bleeding woman came to you to be saved; she kept silent in her voice yet with her hand she cried to you fervently: “Savior, save me!”

Like Jacob, Romanos rehearses a series of miraculous healings, setting the woman’s encounter within a context for the display of Jesus’s healing power. The use of the synecdoche occurs frequently in conjunction with the poetic body. Here the

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65 Romanos Melodos, Hymn XII.2 (XXIII.2).
66 Jacob frequently cites the unnamed women of the New Testament in tandem with one another.
“incorruptible feet” (Ἀφθαρσίας ποσὶν) and the hand of Christ are invoked as Romanos praises the healing power of Christ.

In the following lines the bleeding woman is made present through her *crying* hand (τῇ παλάμη δὲ κράζουσα). Romanos juxtaposes the hand of Christ (“by (your) hand” χειρὶ) with the woman’s outstretched palm (τῇ παλάμη). Rendering the body in pieces is a feature of Romanos’s poetics found in Jacob and Narsai as well. The poet underscores the paradox of her expressive gestures and silence through the taut phrasing: “she kept silent in with regard to her voice” (σιγῶσα φωνῇ). At the same time this shows Romanos adhering closely to the New Testament text, which does not attribute speech to her at this point in the encounter. Before we hear the woman’s voice, her choreographed movements capture her desperate need and receptivity. John Chrysostom, who according to De Matons shares a common source with Romanos, poses the problem to his audience succinctly, “Why did she not come forward with frankness or boldness (μετὰ παῤῥήσιας)?” Chrysostom’s word choice is suggestive of frank verbal exchange, but for Romanos, her bodily gestures foreshadow the boldness of her imagined speech.

After this introduction to the major themes of the *kontakion*, Romanos breaks the silence of the woman through the attribution of imagined speech. Whereas Luke says nothing about the woman’s inner deliberations, Matthew and Mark touch upon them briefly. Mark (8:27) relates that upon hearing about Jesus she came up from behind and touched his cloak, but the Gospel author adds in 8:28 “for she said, ‘If I only touch his

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67 PG 57:371 Τίνος ἔνεκεν οὐ μετὰ παῤῥήσιας αὐτῷ προσήλθεν.
clothes, I will be healed.” Matthew emphasizes the inward nature of her exclamation in 9:21 “for she said to herself (ἐν ἑαυτῇ). The poet echoes the Matthean text as he flags for his audience the hypothetical nature of her words as he expands the biblical story:

Οὐ γὰρ μόνον εἰκὸς ἔλογίζετο ἡ αἰμόρρους καὶ ἔλεγε καθ’ ἑαυτήν. “Πῶς ὀφθήσομαι τῷ παντεπόπτῃ μου, φέρουσα τὴν αἰσχύνην πταισμάτων ἔμων; αἰμάτων ῥύσιν ὁ ἀμώμητος ἐὰν ἴδῃ, χωρεῖ μου ὡς ἀκαθάρτου, καὶ δεινότερον ἔσται μοι τὸ τούτο πληγῆς, ἐὰν ἀποστραφῇ με βοῶσαν αὐτῷ. |: “Σῶτερ, σῶσον με.”:

For the bleeding woman not only pondered, but probably also said to herself: “How will I be perceived by the All-Seeing One since I bear the shame of my errors? If the unblemished one sees the flow of blood, he will withdraw from me as one unclean, It will be more terrifying to me than a blow, if he turns away from me when I cry to him: ‘Savior, save me!’”

This woman’s speech betrays an acute self-awareness as well as theological perspicacity. She is intensely aware of the divine gaze, acknowledging Christ the “All-seeing One” (τῷ παντεπόπτῃ). Aligning the Divine with the noblest of the senses, Romanos underscores the contrast with the woman whose chief sense will be that of touch. Her expression of

68 Mk 5:28 ἔλεγεν γὰρ ὅτι Ἐὰν ἅψωμαι κἂν τῶν ἱματίων αὐτοῦ σωθήσομαι.
69 Albrecht Oepke, “ἐν,” TDNT 2.539. Oepke adds that this formulation is used elsewhere in the Gospels to express ethical and spiritual deliberation.
70 Romanos, Hymn XII 5.1-6 (XXIII.5.1-6).
71 Georgia Frank, The Memory of the Eyes: Pilgrims to Living Saints in Christian Late Antiquity (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 132: “Christians cultivated a religious epistemology that combined the noblest of the senses (sight) with the most animalistic one (touch).” Frank’s observation is made in reference to the visual piety of pilgrimage in Late Antiquity, but the phenomenology of the senses within ancient texts is one feature of the poetic rhetor that I would like to explore further.
fear also casts potential rebuke in the most bodily of terms: a physical blow. The woman gives voice to her bodily knowledge of fearing divine rejection.

This strophe also contains the first concentration of words regarding her relative purity and impurity. The vocabulary here is significant since the imagery will be repeated throughout the following verses. Soon after expressing her dismay at the prospect of the omniscient deity perceiving “the shame of her errors” (τὴν αἰσχύνην πταῖσματων), she further laments that this same “unblemished one” (ὁ ἁμώμητος) might see the flow of blood. While the noun Romanos uses for errors (πταῖσμα) does not appear in the New Testament, the verb πταίω occurs five time in the sense of “to err” or “to sin.”⁷² As in the introductory verses, Romanos shifts effortlessly between the language of sin and the corporeal imagery. What constitutes the woman’s “errors”? This contributes to the theme of penance set forth in the prooimion, but it adds an additional layer to the woman’s character that is not apparent in the scriptural text. Romanos’s attribution of moral failure to this woman adds to the biblical text, coloring this woman’s character negatively.

The vocabulary for error and blemish forms part of a larger set of terms for the woman’s bodily state as the woman introduces the category of impurity within these verses. The woman attenuates the attribution of uncleanness to her present condition, saying that she is “as one unclean” (ὡς ἁκαθάρτου).⁷³ This term weaves throughout the

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⁷³ Within the Gospels, this term (ἀκαθάρτος) is used frequently in relationship to the presence of “unclean spirits,” for instance see Mt 10:1, 12:43; Mk 1:23-27, 3:11, 30, 5:2-8. See also Lucian, Lexiphanes 19: καὶ ἦδη γε ἡπειμὶ παρὰ τὸν ἑταῖρον Κλεινίαν, ὅτι πυνθάνομαι χρόνου ἥδη ἁκάθαρτον εἶναι αὐτῷ τὴν
often cited intertext, Leviticus 15, which begins regarding the bodily fluxes of men to offer a “law of his uncleanness” (ὁ νόμος τῆς ἀκαθαρσίας αὐτοῦ). The poetic woman’s fear that Jesus will withdraw raises questions about the isolation of the menstruant. Romanos’s Hemorrhaging woman thus projects a view of Jesus as assiduously concerned with maintaining purity.

Within these verses Romanos depicts the Hemorrhaging woman’s body as acutely conspicuous, a point accentuated by the woman herself. This emphasis on the visibility of uncleanness, along with attendant pressures to seek purification, reminds the reader that purity is not limited to the corporeality of the individual but extends to the community as well. Romanos varies his vocabulary for the act of seeing, but the parallelism formed between these two lines underscores the slippage between the language of error and the bodily element of blood. The Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron displays a similar slippage between the language of healing and the attribution of sin. Within the Commentary’s lengthy treatment, one passage brings the moral valence of the text into stark relief:

Along with the fact that she learned that he healed visible afflictions, she also learned that he is the one who knows hidden realities. And the one who heals

bodily afflictions and scrutinizes the hidden things of the mind she believed him to be the Lord of the body and the Judge of the mind. Wherefore, as though for the Lord of the body, she subdued the body with its passions, and as though for the Judge of the mind, she controlled the mind and its reflections. She was afraid to commit any offence, since she believed that he could see her, he who saw her when she touched his cloak from behind him. (Mk 5:27) And she was afraid to transgress, even in thought, for she knew that nothing was hidden from him concerning whom she had testified: For this too is not hidden from him (Cf. Lk 8:47).75

Through evoking the vocabulary of ritual purity, Romanos makes an interpretative turn familiar to both ancient and modern interpreters of this pericope. The concatenation of terms for purity, blemish, and shame is symptomatic of broader Christian tendencies for speaking about sin and moral impurity.76

In the context of this strophe and in the stanzas that follow, the woman and the crowd express profound anxiety about her proximity to Christ and the potential for Christ to be dishonored through her approach. Within the following stanza Romanos continues to use the rhetorical device of *ethopoeia* (attribution of imagined speech) to develop the woman’s character. If Romanos interiorized the previous deliberation by invoking Matthew 9:21 “for she said to herself” (ἐν ἑαυτῇ), here he takes this hypothetical speech

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76 Bildstein, *Purity, Community, and Ritual in Early Christian Literature*, esp. 150-156. The blending of sexual sins with notions of defilement comes to the fore in Paul’s Epistles such as Galatians 5:19: “The works of the flesh are manifest, which are sexual immorality, impurity, licentiousness…” (φανερὰ δὲ ἐστὶν τὰ ἔργα τῆς σαρκός, ἀτινὰ ἐστίν πορνεία, ἀκαθαρσία, ἀσέλγεια..).
a step further: she now conjectures the imagined speech of the crowd. Once again the
woman perceives her condition as easily discernable for those around her:

Συνωθοῦσι με πάντες ὁρῶντές με, ἐποιεῖ σὺ προσέρχει; βοῶντες μοι.
κατανόησον, γύναι, τὸ αἰσχὸς σου, γνῶθι τίς τίνι θέλεις ἐγγίσαι νυνί,
tῷ ἀμωμήτῳ ἡ ἀκάθαρτος. Ἄπιθι καὶ καθάρθητι ἀπὸ ῥύπου

Upon seeing me, everyone crowds around me, yelling out to me, ‘Now where are you
going?
Think about your shame, now, woman! Do you know whom you wish to approach?
The impure one to the unblemished one! Go away and purify yourself from filth.’

The woman projects a vision of a judgmental and forceful crowd rebuking her approach.
As an exercise in ethopoeia, this passage from Romanos scripts a woman’s projection of
social pressure onto herself. She anticipates what the crowd would say, an idealized form
of feminine self-monitoring and intense focus on her own body within the social space.
The crowd relentlessly draws attention to her unclean state as they seek to separate her
from Jesus. Romanos’s language of filth recalls a similar passage from his kontakion on
the Samaritan woman: “For she went out in filth (ἐν ῥύπῳ), but she came back
unblemished (ἄμωμος) in the figure of the church.” The listener versed in Paul’s
epistles would surely hear the reference to Ephesians 5:27 as the apostle describes Jesus
taking the Church as his bride, “holy and unblemished (ἄμωμος).” This language of
purity, mixed with references to the woman’s honor, emphasizes the challenge of female
embodiment she will need to overcome.

77 Romanos, Hymn XII.6.1-3 (XXIII.6.1-3).
78 Romanos, Hymn IX.5.5 (XIX.5.5): ἐξῆλθε γὰρ ἐν ῥύπῳ, εἰσῆλθε δὲ ἐν τύπῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀμωμος.
79 Ephesians 5:27 ἵνα παραστήσῃ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἔνδοξον τήν ἐκκλησίαν, μὴ ἔχουσαν σπίλον ἢ ρυτίδα ἢ τι
tῶν τοιούτων, ἀλλ’ ἵνα ἡ ἁγία καὶ ἀμωμος.
Later in the poem the woman’s hypothetical interlocutors express their fear that her approach will dishonor Christ. Anxiety over the proximity of impurity to the divine compels them to censure the lone woman. One final stanza will demonstrate how the registers of impurity and sin blend within Romanos’s telling. Here the woman addresses the crowd:

Τοῦ ἐμοῦ πάθους τάχα βουλεύεσθε χαλεπώτεροι ἄνδρες γενέσθαι μοι; μὴ γὰρ νῦν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ κεκράτιμαι ὶδα ὅτι αὐτὸς καθαρός ἐστιν· ὅθεν αὐτῷ καὶ προσελεύσομαι τῶν ὀνειδισμῶν ῥυσθῆναι καὶ τῶν κηλίδων· μὴ κωλύσητε οὖν ρῶσιν δρέψασθαι μέ·

“Perhaps you men wish to be harsher on me than my suffering? I am not seized by ignorance, am I? I know that he is pure; that is why I will approach him, to be delivered from the reproach and the stains. Do not hinder me, then, from regaining my strength.”

Whether read in Greek or in English translation, the forcefulness of the woman’s tone is unmistakable as she rebukes her interlocutors. She chastises them for underestimating her knowledge and conscious intent. Romanos uses a poetic doubling here as the woman expresses her desire “to be delivered from the reproach and the stains.” The term ὀνειδισμός may be defined as “disgrace,” “reproach,” or “calumny,” possessing a social valence. The author of Hebrews applies the term to Moses’s righteous willingness to be mistreated among the Egyptians: “holding disgrace for the sake of Christ as greater riches than the treasures of Egypt.”

80 Romanos, Hymn XII.7.1-4 (XXIII.7.1-4).
81 Heb 11:26: μείξονα πλοῦτον ἡγησάμενος τῶν Ἀιγύπτων θησαυρῶν τὸν ὀνειδισμὸν τοῦ Χριστοῦ.
Romanos’s language of “stain” (κηλίς) encapsulates the blending of physical and moral registers in his depiction of the Hemorrhaging woman. This term does not appear in the New Testament, but within Greek Tragedy the term was used for “stain,” “spot,” and “defilement” (especially) with respect to blood. Within Byzantine Greek the word acquires a moral valence. Despite the lack of attestation within the New Testament, the word appears several times in John Chrysostom’s homilies. In a homily on Matthew 15:1, where Jesus responds to a challenge that the disciples do not cleanse their hands, Chrysostom castigates his audience that people show great care for entering the church with clean hands and dress but neglect the “filth of the mouth (that is): evil speech, blasphemy, abuse, angry speech, profane speech, laughter, (and) wit.” Chrysostom exhorts his audience not to cease their physical ablutions, but to cleanse themselves in the virtues as well so they might be confident that they are “not filthy (or polluted) with this filth (ῥύπον), approach with courage (θαῤῥῶν); but if you have numberless times received these stains (τὰς κηλίδας), why do you labor in vain, washing all around your tongue with water, but bearing such destructive and hurtful filth on it?” Here we see a range of terms we have previously encountered appear in concert as well. Romanos

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82 LSJ, s.v. “κηλίς.” For example in Aeschylus’s Eumenides the chorus of the Erinyes uses this term to describe what they might do to Athens: “[justice] will throw upon the land man-destroying defilements” (βροτοφθόρους κηλίδας ἐν χώραι βαλεῖ). For the Greek text and translation see Alan H. Sommerstein, trans. Aeschylus II. Oresteia: Agamemnon, Libation-Bearers, Eumenides, LCL 146 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), l. 787.

83 PG 58:516 Ῥύπος γὰρ στόματος, κακηγορία, βλασφημία, ὀργίλα ῥήματα, αἰσχρολογία, γέλως, εὐτραπελία.

84 PG 58:516 μηδὲ ῥυπῶντι τὸν ῥύπον τοῦτον, πρὸσελθεὶς θαῤῥῶν· εἰ δὲ μυριάκες ταύτας ὀδέξω τὰς κηλίδας, τί μετατιθεῖσθι, ὅσα μὲν περικλύζων τὴν γλῶτταν, τὸν δὲ ὀλέθριον καὶ βλαβερὸν περιφέρειν ἐν αὐτῇ ῥύπον.
depicts the woman as giving voice to her bodily defilement through a vocabulary infused with a moral register, lending her bodily defilement symbolic meaning. While Moshe Bildstein and Christine Hayes observe the ways Paul imbued Christian language of defilement with a pervading sense of sexual sin, here we see a different side of Christian sensibilities around impurity. For Romanos, the blood of this woman bears the symbolic weight of the defiling force of sin.

2.4 A Body Beyond the Law: The Afflicted Woman in Jacob of Serugh

Overviews of the reception history of this text have rarely considered Syriac literature beyond references to Ephrem. Writing slightly earlier than Romanos, Jacob of Serugh provides an alternative account of the Hemorrhaging woman, and in the process, a different approach to rendering the body in verse. Jacob shares with his literary forebears and contemporaries writing in Syriac a predilection for the language and imagery of healing. Employing a range of terms to describe the woman’s ailment, Jacob offers his listener a fuller picture of the woman’s medical history than the biblical narrative, intensifying her bodily suffering. While Jacob punctuates his account with the vocabulary of impurity, it is invoked selectively and relatively infrequently. Romanos shifts seamlessly between the physical and spiritual registers of illness and defilement, but Jacob’s slower and deliberate pacing allows him to hold these two spheres separate.

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85 Aho Shemunkasho, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2002), 252-274. Shemunkasho gives a detailed analysis of Ephrem’s interpretation, but he neither places this tradition into conversation with the Latin and Greek authors nor extends beyond the writings of the fourth-century Syriac author.
As we have seen, Romanos’s language creates a degree of ambiguity as to the character of the Hemorrhaging woman; her illness materializes her “errors.” In contrast, through his empathetic meditation on the woman’s physical suffering, Jacob stresses the physical suffering of the woman and amplifies the extraordinary character of this woman and her agency in seeking a cure.

Before introducing the afflicted woman, Jacob reminds the listener of Jesus’s previous actions such as restoring a man’s withered hand (Mt 12:9-14), saving the Canaanite woman’s daughter from Satan (Mt 15:21-28), and forgiving the sins of the woman who wept (Lk 7:36-48). Against the backdrop of Jesus’s ministry, the woman enters the “narrative stage” through a staid description of her illness and efforts to find a cure. Jacob tells us that she wanted to bind up her “great sore” (ܫܘܚܢܗ ܪܒܐ), the term the Peshitta translator uses in Luke 16:20 in reference to Lazarus’s sores. Altering his vocabulary, Jacob adds that this painful “ulcer” persisted, but she was afraid to reveal herself to doctors. The gender politics of the poem turn on the (in)visibility of the sexed body. Over a series of verses Jacob relates how the illness became a chronic condition.

86 Jacob cites over a dozen Gospel narratives ranging from miraculous healings, the casting out of demons, and the feedings of the multitudes.
87 The Syriac text may be found in *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serug*, ed. by Paul Bedjan and Sebastian Brock (Paris – Leipzig, 1905, 2nd ed. Piscataway, NJ, 2006), V.525-551. I have consulted the fine translation published in Jacob of Sarug, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met*, trans. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Sebastian P. Brock, Reyhan Durmaz, Rebecca Stephens Falcasantos, Michael Payne, and Daniel Picus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 178-233. I will provide the page number of the translation as well for further reference, but I have frequently made changes. Jacob, *Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,”* V.529.80; idem, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met*, 186. The word for sore (ܫܘܚܢܐ) does not appear to be a common word in Ephrem’s medical vocabulary.
over the course of months and years, a relentless force “crushing” her. The woman’s
desire to preserve her privacy is slowly overcome as she grows more desperate:

And as soon as the pain grew stronger than herself, she was overwhelmed;
and she started to tell to some individuals (her) secret (ܐܪܙܐ), so that some (relief)
may be found for her.
She began with women and to her companions she recounted her pain;
and her friends with whom she shared her secret (ܐܪܙܗ) took care of her.
And as the pain overwhelmed (these) wise women;
she started to show her pain to the doctors, in suffering.
She gave herself both to exposure (ܘܠܦܘܪܣܝܐ) and to (great) expenses;
(in the hope) that even under shame and loss (of money) she might be healed.88

In contrast to the terse account of her history in the Gospels, Jacob offers a logical
progression of the woman’s actions that intensifies the motif of her suffering and
distress.89 Avoiding the language of blood, Jacob favors the generic terms “ulcer” and
“illness” to describe her ailment. The revelation and exposure of the woman’s body,
frequently referred to within these lines, advances the larger themes of the mēmrā,
namely the disclosure of Christ’s divinity through his healing. The woman’s own body

88 Jacob, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” V.529-530.95-103; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on
Women Whom Jesus Met, 186-188.
89 Gerd Theissen, The Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg
Fortress Press, 1983), 51-52. Of the three Gospel accounts, only Mk 5:26 and Lk 8:43 report that the
woman had been treated by physicians to no avail.
harbors a “secret” (ܐܪܙܐ), a word which possesses a broad semantic range and is used as a term for sacrament, type, mystery, and symbol.

Within the late ancient world and early Christian texts physicians enjoyed variable degrees of status. Studies of the medical profession within antiquity have relied heavily on Egyptian papyri as well as inscriptions from Greece and Asia minor. Jacob maintains a sense of propriety within his imaginative reconstruction of the woman’s strife. As she confides in her female companions, they attempt to care for her – an experience of community with which one can imagine the women in Jacob’s audience identifying. Due to her bodily condition, this woman fears exposure and seeks concealment. As Jacob details the woman’s experience confiding in her female companions and eventually doctors to no avail, he plays upon audience expectations surrounding the women’s behavior. The failure of doctors to effectively treat her illness compounds the physical suffering she experiences:

She had enough of exposing herself to so many people, and she was weary of wasting (her money) on all the surgeons. For a long time the illness nested within her limbs as a serpent in a cavity hiding from the snake charmers.

91 Jacob, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” V.531.123-126; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 190.
The woman visited multiple doctors, but Jacob nuances the Gospel accounts by characterizing the woman as reticent. Visiting doctors not only depletes her funds but also requires her to expose her body to strangers, specifically male strangers. Jacob distinguishes – personifies – her illness as a foreign entity within her body. This draws attention to her bodily condition, but it also shows a degree of discernment between health and illness.

Jacob’s juxtaposition of the female confidants with the ineffective physicians becomes more suggestive if viewed through the lens of gender expectations and bodily exposure. The doctors do not simply fail to find her a cure, but they cause her shame:

Those doctors who made her expose herself but failed to heal her.92

The poet’s vocabulary supports the plausibility of this reading. Imagining the woman’s inner deliberations, Jacob employs the word פָּרָסַיָּה to describe the act of “revealing” or “uncovering” herself before physicians. Related to the quadrilateral root פָּרָסַי (Jewish Palestinian Aramaic פָּרָסַי) meaning “to expose, shame, uncover,” the term appears in relation to biblical incidents of shameful bodily exposure and specifically female vulnerability.93 Within the Peshitta Judith uses this term as she recounts the rape of

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92 Jacob, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” V.532.140; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 192.
93 Michael Sokoloff, A Syriac Lexicon, s.v. פָּרָסַי. Within Ephrem’s prose commentary on Genesis, the exposure of Eve’s nudity is described with this term. R.M. Tonneau, Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Comentarii. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 152, Scriptores Syri 76 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1955), 38:19. This term derives from the Greek loanword parrhēsia, which I will examine in Chapter Five.
Dinah. Here Jacob echoes Ephrem’s vocabulary and interpretation within his *Hymns on Nisibis*:

For twelve years the doctors exposed her, that woman of blood – they exposed but did not help. Had they healed her, it (still) would be a disgrace, Now that they did not heal, how much (bigger is the disgrace)? For as much as these ones exposed her, You kept (her) chaste and healed her. While she was concealed, she approached your outer garment, but not your body; The garment that makes all chaste, became a healer for her.\(^{95}\)

For both Jacob and Ephrem, the unsuccessful doctors are a foil for the healing power of Jesus, mirroring the emphasis of Mark. However, the Syriac poets go beyond the Gospel account by depicting Jesus as preserving her chastity, further proof of his distinct healing powers. Within his *mēmrā* on the Sinful Woman, Jacob says that any sick person approaches a doctor without shame, seemingly contradicting the statements we’ve seen here.\(^{96}\) While one should not impose a forced coherence on Jacob’s thought, the

\(^{94}\) Jdt 9:2 “My Lord, God of my father Simeon, to whom you gave a sword in his hand to take vengeance on (his) enemies who unbound the hair of the virgin to defile [her], revealed her nakedness for disgrace, and defiled her womb for shame – for you said that it should not be so.” A similar usage is found in Ex 20:26: “You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.” I return to this passage in Chapter Five.


sentiments he expresses concerning the shame of the bleeding women seem specific to
the intimate nature of her illness.

Jacob refrains from quoting large portions of the biblical text in succession, but he
begins to intensify his description of the woman’s pain in the verses which follow.
Embellishing the biblical narrative, Jacob builds drama by depicting the woman’s ailment
as gradually increasing, growing more unbearable over the years:

The flow of her blood tormented that woman of pains more and more.
For twelve years she lived with the blood in a state of uncleanness. 97

Jacob introduces the root ܐܵܒܪܥܵܐ found here for uncleanness (ܐܵܒܪܥܵܐ) and used at various
points in the verses that follow. This word functions as one Syriac synonym for the Greek
term ἁκαθαρσία, but within the letters of Paul (Gal 5:19; 2 Cor 12:21), ἁκαθαρσία is
translated with ܢܦܘܬܐ. The root ܐܵܒܪܥܵܐ possesses a sexualized charge supporting the
claims of Christine Hayes and Moshe Bildstein that Paul accentuates the sexual
implications of purity language and demonstrating that the Syriac translators understood
Paul in the way Hayes and Bildstein observe. 98 The root ܐܵܒܪܥܵܐ appears throughout the
Peshitta of Leviticus 15, but only rarely in the New Testament, sometimes where
ἁκάθαρτος occurs. 99 Syriac biblical translators, along with Jacob, show great discernment

97 Jacob, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” V.531.132-133; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on
Women Whom Jesus Met, 190.
98 Sokoloff, s.v.ܐܵܒܪܥܵܐ.
99 Like the Greek, this term can be used for “unclean spirits” (cf. Mk 1:23).
in their choice of vocabulary for bodily purity – ranging from the ritual to the moral. While these cases need to be substantiated with further studies, it is possible that Syriac Christians maintained a distinction between ritual and moral purity through their specialized vocabulary. These nuances may be less pronounced in Greek (and certainly in English translations).

The frequency of Jacob’s use of the root ܢܡܐ within this ܡܡܪܐ appears more pronounced when we read this alongside his narration of the woman who anoints Jesus. This story appears in various renditions throughout the four Gospels (Mt 26:6-13, Mk 14:3-9, Lk 7:36-50, Jn 12:1-11). Tracing the vocabulary for defilement and pollution, one quickly discovers a range of Syriac terms for these concepts. While we will attend to her story with greater detail in subsequent chapters, a tangentially related set of words coalesce around her. She is indeed “polluted”:

を探すと、彼女は汚かったことを考えた。彼女は汚かった (ܡܣܝܒܬܐ) 女人, で、彼は汚れた (ܡܣܝܒܬܐ) 女人に近づかせなかった。

And [Simon] perceived that this one who entered was a sinful woman, and he did not let the polluted (ܘܕܚܛܝܬܐ) woman approach him.100

Here Jacob describes this woman with a root with a similar semantic range to ܢܡܐ, meaning to defile or pollute. Whereas ܢܡܐ is found in Leviticus and rarely in the New

100 The Syriac text may be found in Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serugh, ed. by Paul Bedjan and Sebastian Brock (Paris – Leipzig, 1905, 2nd ed. Piscataway, NJ, 2006), and a complete English translation exists in Jacob of Sarug, Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Sinful Woman, trans. Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013). I have consulted and will provide references to Johnson’s translation, but the translations provided here are do not always coincide with that of Johnson. Jacob, Homily 51 “On the Sinful Woman Whose Sins Our Lord Forgave,” II.417.313-314; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Sinful Woman, 58.
Testament, the root ܣܘܒ appears throughout the New Testament, sometimes in a past participle construction to translate ἀκάθαρτος.\textsuperscript{101} By selecting the specific term (ܛܡܐ) found in Leviticus for his description of the bleeding woman, Jacob strengthens the link with the purity regulations. Jacob – unlike Romanos – uses purity vocabulary to maintain a distinction between ritual and moral implications of purity discourses, preserving the Hemorrhaging woman from any taint of sin.

In addition to the language of purity, Jacob draws attention to the woman’s body through reference to her illness and its location. Before this poetic woman speaks, Jacob continues to attend to her body and its suffering. His uses of synecdoche often invoke her limbs (ܗܕܡܝ), a body part frequently referred to by Narsai in his mēmrā featuring Eve. Jacob repeats the duration of her illness, adding “For twelve years her flux had been persistent in her limbs.”\textsuperscript{102} Romanos drew attention to the woman’s hand as a means of expression, but Jacob attends to her body as harboring this disease. These repeated references to her body and the ailment it contains, in conjunction with his choice of ritual purity language, underscore the transitory nature of the woman’s defilement. She is healed and purified.

Through the voice of the narrator, Jacob describes the woman’s condition with sympathy. In the first imagined speech attributed to the woman, Jacob depicts the woman

\textsuperscript{102} Jacob, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” V.531.133; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 190.
as addressing her own illness, willing its expulsion from her body. Jacob builds dramatic tension through casting her affliction as a foe, rendering her ailment an ominous but silent presence:

And at that time she began in suffering to speak to her pain:
You, stop and leave me, multiplier of my pains and my anxieties.
You, stop and leave me, evil sore which embitters my rest, and which has pierced me and torn me to pieces, weakened me, thrown me down, and increased my pains.
You, stop and leave me, cursed traveler who has come to dwell with me, and who has destroyed everything I had and still does not depart.
You, stop and leave me, oh companion, who has yoked me to himself, by a yoke of pain and who does not let me go, even though I hate him.\textsuperscript{103}

The frequency with which the woman uses the same words at the beginning of the verses (ܟܕܘܠܟܡܢܝ) accentuates the rhythmic nature of these lines. As the verses build in their momentum, the woman’s words crescendo with anger and courage, confronting the source of her suffering. Within the performative context of the liturgy, one must imagine the audience feeling the ebb and flow of these emotive lines. In Jacob’s hands, the woman’s monologue presents here as an “observing and reflexive ‘I,’ a mindful self” that occupies a position outside the body, an ancient Christian precursor to conceptions of the

\textsuperscript{103} Jacob, \textit{Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,”} V.532.143-150; idem, \textit{Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met,} 192.

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self usually ascribed to the post-Enlightenment period.\textsuperscript{104} This is a woman coming to terms with the embodied state that has driven her to the point of collapse.

As Jacob continues, the woman not only transgresses the purity statutes that would prohibit her from approaching Christ, but she disputes the applicability of the law itself. Attributing the laws that bind her actions to Moses, Jacob scripts the woman as engaging in an argument about the scope of the law:

\begin{center}
ܐܡܪܐ ܒܢܦܫܗ  ܠܐ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܢܛܪ ܠܝ ܟܐܒܐ܇
ܕܐܝܟ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܕܐܝܬ ܠܟܝܢܐ ܒܛܟܣܐ ܢܪܕܐ܀
ܠܐ ܡܩܝܡܐ ܐܢܐ ܥܠ ܢܡܘܣܐ ܕܡܛܡܐ ܠܝ܇
ܐܐ ܥܒܪ ܐܬܛܦܐ ܒܗ܀
̈
ܕܗܐ ܡܕܟܝܢܐ ܕܛܡ
̈
ܐܦ ܗܘ ܟܐܒܐ ܥܒܪܗ ܬܚܘܡܐ ܕܟܠܗܝܢ ܢܫ
ܐܬܐ܀
\end{center}

She says to herself, “For me, illness has not observed the law, For just as the law which exists for nature, (my illness) should run (ܢܪܕܐ) in an orderly way.\textsuperscript{105} I do not affirm the law which pronounces me unclean, For behold, the purifier of the unclean passes by, I will cleave to him.\textsuperscript{106} Just as this illness surpasses the limit (set) for all women, so now I will surpass the limit (set) for all unclean women.\textsuperscript{107}

Through verbal repetition Jacob weaves together the woman’s argument and presses the semantic range of his vocabulary. With the repeated invocation of the “law” (ܢܡܘܣܐ) and “limit” or “boundary” (ܬܚܘܡܐ), the poetic Hemorrhaging woman meditates upon the

\textsuperscript{104} Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock, “The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology,” \textit{Medical Anthropology Quarterly} 1, no. 1 (1987): 12-13. Scheper-Hughes and Lock plot this idea relatively recently within the philosophical traditions starting with the thought of John Locke and René Descartes.

\textsuperscript{105} A Greek loanword from τάξις, the “order of nature” is expressed as ܟܝܢܝܐ ܛܟܣܐ.

\textsuperscript{106} Alt. “find shelter in him.”

\textsuperscript{107} Jacob, \textit{Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,”} V. 535.221-226; idem, \textit{Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met}, 200.
forces which circumscribe her actions. Here Jacob also repeats verbs to extend their meaning. Playing upon the verb نردا, Jacob employs it here to describe the law’s consonance with nature, but the attentive ear recalls that this same verb and its related nominal forms also described the woman’s “flow” of blood. In parallel fashion, just as Jesus “passes” by or over حبš her physical location, she employs the same verb to describe her own movement “beyond” or “exceeding” the restraints of the law.

Beyond demonstrating the virtuosity of Jacob’s compositional strategies, these verses are remarkable for the depiction of a woman challenging her status according to a constructed conception of the Levitical law. While we previously explored her confrontation with her illness, here the woman challenges the scope of the law through suggesting that her own bodily condition exceeds the boundaries of nature. Jacob presents the woman as reasoning from her own bodily experience: her transcendence of the law emerges from the shameful excess of her flesh.108 Elaine Scarry observed that pain “shatters” language. The poetic Hemorrhaging woman who emerges from Jacob’s pen finds her voice in the very pain that threatens to crush her.109

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108 The example from Syriac literature resonates with the observations of Virginia Burrus about late ancient meditations on the “boundlessness of materiality” and the flesh in light of the incarnation and bodily resurrection in “Carnal Excess: Flesh at the Limits of Imagination,” *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 17, no. 2 (2009): 247-249 and 263-265.

2.5 Life Imitating Poetry: The Authorial Presence of Jacob of Serugh and Romanos

Inserting themselves into their compositions, Christian poets crafted authorial personae, fashioning themselves as models of the penitent, Christian self. Reading Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos alongside one another, one begins to see the range of self-presentation among late antique poets. Reflecting on the significance of liturgical poetry for the history of interiority and Christian subjectivity in Byzantium, Derek Krueger draws on hymnography and the rhythms of the liturgical calendar to uncover “broadly disseminated and collective modes for constructing and expressing a common individuality” that placed heavy emphasis on penitence and sin. Through introductory remarks, the rhetorical device of apostrophe or direct address, and exhortation, poets presented themselves as Christian subjects, bridging the gap between the listener and the biblical model. In these writings we find a carefully crafted poetic self, often synonymous with the narrator. Within their compositions on the Hemorrhaging woman, both Romanos and Jacob forge a link between their poetic performance and the woman herself, specifically in reference to her body. While scholars have called attention to the

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110 Throughout this work I follow the recent trend within comparative hymnography to attend to the “poetic persona” each author crafts within the text. Thomas Arentzen observes, “We frequently fail to differentiate between the poetic I and the poet or the singer. When we mean the first person singular of a kontakion, we tend to say ‘Romanos says this and Romanos says that’. Yet the first-person singular of the text does not equal the Romanos of history, however much he may have inscribed himself into the text. This holds true even if we assume that he was the performer of his own kontakia, which he can only have been during his own lifetime” (“Voices Interwoven: Refrains and Vocal Participation in the Kontakia,” Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik 66 (2016): 4). This observation could easily be extended to Jacob and Narsai.

111 Krueger, Liturgical Subjects, 8.

112 Krueger, Liturgical Subjects, 43.
introductory verses for Syriac and Greek poetry as modeling religious subjectivity, Romanos and Jacob establish distinct poetic personae despite exhorting their listeners to follow their model of repentance. While Jacob differentiates the Hemorrhaging woman from his audience through her verbosity and engagement with the Levitical law, Romanos confuses the woman’s moral and bodily condition purposefully.

The form of the *kontakia* provided a consistency to Romanos’s performance of his poetic persona throughout his corpus. Despite variations in the form of his acrostics, Romanos consistently includes his own signature: Ῥωμανοῦ.\(^{113}\) Romanos exercises greater creative freedom in the prelude (refered to as the *koukoulion* or *prooīmion*) as he crafts a “performable identity” through first-person singular speech, offering a script for proper self-regard.\(^{114}\) Often found within the opening and closing lines of the poems, these lines form a narrative frame, preparing the reader for the rest of the poem.\(^{115}\) While all poets orient their audience within the opening lines, Romanos and Jacob are notable for invoking their own presence, often exhorting their audiences to imitate them by assume a posture of receptivity and contrition before the divine. Looking specifically at their works on the Hemorrhaging woman, we observe how Romanos blurs the boundaries

\(^{113}\) J. Grosdidier de Matons, *Romanos le Mélode et les origine de la poésie religieuse à Byzance* (Paris: Éditions Beauchesne, 1977), 42-45. As de Matons observes, acrostics were devices for the ear rather than the eye, contributing to the listener’s experience of the poem.


\(^{115}\) Scholars disagree as to the function of the prooīmion (προοίμιον). Responding to Tomadakis, J. Grosdidier de Matons pointedly rejects claims that the prooīmion does not set out the “general” themes developed throughout the poem (*Romanos Le Mélode*, 40). It may be preferable to judge each *kontakion* individually, and for this particular work the introductory verses do set out themes that are pursued throughout the poem.
of gender through identification with her physical posture, while Jacob offers a vision of himself as a spokesperson for the downtrodden woman.

Assimilating the desire to mirror the penitent disposition of the Hemorrhaging woman leads Romanos to exhort his listener to imitate her physical posture. In the opening lines of his kontakion on the Hemorrhaging woman, Romanos calls his listener to assume the prostrate position of the woman:

Ὡς ἡ αἱμόρρους προσπίπτω σοι, κύριε, ὡς ἐπεί τὸ ἄλγος με ῥύσῃ, φιλάνθρωπε, καὶ πταισμάτων μοι παράσχῃς συγχώρησιν, ἵνα ἐν κατανύξει καρδίας κραυγάξω σοι. |: “Σῶτερ, σῶσον με.”:|

As the bleeding woman, I prostrate myself before you, Lord, that you may rescue me from pain, Benevolent One, and grant forgiveness for my mistakes, so with sorrow (compunction) of heart, I may cry to you, “Savior, save me!”

The male poet likens himself to a woman defined by her bodily over-abundance, a flow of blood lacking explicit explanation. Here Romanos provides a script for the listener (and reader), modeling the proper “interpretative response to the performance of a speaking subject.” The poet forges a relationship between the “textual” bodies of the poetic persona and the biblical character and the “real” bodies of the listeners. Echoing

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116 Romanos, Hymn XII.pro (XXIII.pro).
117 Simon Goldhill, “Literary History without Literature: Reading Practices in the Ancient World,” SubStance 28, no. 1 (1999): 60-62. In this article Goldhill sets aside the nebulous over-arching category of “literature” in favor of a history of reading centered on larger “cultural politics of reading,” namely how reading was integral to the construction of political subjects and was understood as an embodied practice. Tracing these themes through classical and early Christian literature, Goldhill shows continuity over time.
the vocabulary of Matthew 9:20, “a woman hemorrhaging for twelve years” (γυνὴ αἱμορροοῦσα δώδεκα ἔτη), Romanos assumes the same posture as this woman at the end of the narrative. Through assuming this same position, Romanos proclaims a parallel mirroring of the woman’s inward state as well. Within the context of Christian worship, the poet shows how attentiveness to one’s body accompanies (perhaps even spurs) vigilance over the state of the soul. The kneeling position of the woman, a key characterizing trait within her iconography, appears open to the interpretation of the viewer.

The liturgical setting of the vigil provides the poem a setting. Within the Gospel of Mark, the healing takes place near the edge of a lake before a large crowd (ὄχλος πολύς, Mk 5:21) where Jairus, the leader of the synagogue, will first approach Jesus and start leading him towards his house - at which point the Hemorrhaging woman confronts him. Romanos does not specify where the dramatic actions take place; the Christian congregation stands alongside the “crowd” to witness the events unfold. Romanos foregrounds his own verbalized plea for forgiveness of his errors, rhythmically punctuating the line with alliteration (ἐν κατανύξει καρδίας κραυγάζω σοι). He ends with the refrain that will weave throughout the kontakion, “Savior, save me” (Σῶτηρ σῶσόν με), inviting his audience to voice an appeal the woman herself does not verbalize in the

118 Csordas, “Somatic Modes of Attention,” 139. The presence of the body is a given, but specific contexts accentuate attention to the body; the Christian liturgy is one instance where one encounters “culturally elaborated attention to and with the body in the immediacy of an intersubjective milieu.”
biblical text. This short refrain, one that slides off the tongue with its smooth sibilance, evokes the full resonances of the verb “to heal” and “to save” in Greek, σῴζειν, his choice of verb suggesting both healing and salvation. Although the congregation will repeat the refrain, each instantiation lends the refrain new meaning in light of its immediate location with each stanza.

Poets relied on bodily postures and gestures to communicate inner dispositions and spiritual states. The relationships between the poet, reader, and the body are orchestrated in different ways. In his introductory stanza, Romanos does not shy away from the specificity of this woman’s bleeding body. Modeling his own self upon her, Romanos renders his own identity fluid, assuming the position of an ailing female body as an outward signal of his spiritual state.

Romanos reinforces the supplicatory tone of the prooimion through his vocabulary, steeped in the language of the Septuagint, especially the Psalms. Addressing God as “Benevolent one” or literally the “lover of humanity” (φιλάνθρωπε), Romanos evokes the image of a generous, merciful leader. His petition that God “rescue [him]

120 Thomas Arentzen provides an overview for how the refrain (ἀνακλώμενον) functioned within Romanos’s poetry in “Voices Interwoven: Refrains and Vocal Participation in the Kontakia,” 1-10. For parallel development of the refrain within piyyutim, see Laura Lieber, “The Rhetoric of Participation: Experiential Elements of Early Hebrew Liturgical poetry,” Journal of Religion 90, no. 2 (2010): 119-147. Werner Foerster, “σῴζω, σωτηρία, σωτήρ, σωτήριος,” TDNT 7.965-1024; Selvidge, Woman, Cult, and Miracle Recital, 91-92. Selvidge underscores the importance of this verb for Mark: “The immediate result of touching Jesus’s garments did not bring σωτηρία and thus discipleship. It brought healing (ιάται) from her μάστιξ (Mark 5:29). In Greek thought, ιάομαι has the idea of restoration, making good and release from physical suffering. Mark uses ιάομαι only once. The context is the alleviation of this woman’s physical-emotional suffering. In both instance that the verb is used in Leviticus, it is found in the context of healing someone who is considered unclean.” The texts in Leviticus Selvidge references are Lev 14:3 and 14:48. Arentzen, “Voices Interwoven: Refrains and Vocal Participation in the Kontakia,” 3. While the Septuagint applies this term to rulers in II Mac 4:11 and IV Mac 5:12, it is noteworthy that it
from pain” is the first instance of Romanos’s blending of the language of salvation (ῥόση) with the bodily discourse of pain and healing (ἄλγους). The verb “to rescue, save” (ῥυομαι) occurs throughout the Psalms, but the accounts of this healing within the New Testament favor the more familiar verb for healing, σώζειν. This particular form of the verb (ῥόση) also bears a sonic similarity to the description of the woman’s ailment in Mark 5:25 and Luke 8:43 which share the identical phrase usually translated “with a flow of blood” (ἐν ῥύσει αἵματος). One could claim that this is a mere coincidence that would go unnoticed by the majority of listeners, but to those attuned to the language of the biblical text, it creates a playful resonance, enhancing the corporeal excess at the center of the narrative.

Through a playful use of the New Testament vocabulary, Romanos shifts the sequence of events to anticipate the dramatic conclusion of the narrative. After touching Jesus’s garment and perceiving “in her body” his healing, Mark and Luke’s accounts claim that the woman emerged from the crowd and threw herself at Jesus’s feet, confessing that she is the one who furtively grasped at his garment. A listener familiar with the Gospel text will notice Romanos’s use of the same verb “to fall before, prostrate oneself” (προσπίπτω) which appears (albeit in a different verbal form) in Mark 5:33 and Luke 8:47. As used in the Septuagint, the verb expresses not only respect for authority, is applied as a descriptor of wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon. Cf. Wis 7:23 “For wisdom is a kindly spirit, but will not free blasphemers from the guilt of their words; because God is witness of their inmost feelings, and a true observer of their hearts, and a hearer of their tongues” (φιλάνθρωπον γὰρ πνεῦμα σοφία καὶ οὐκ ἀθρωπεῖ βλάσφημον ἀπὸ χειλέων αὐτοῦ· ὅτι τῶν νεφρῶν αὐτοῦ μάρτυς ὁ θεὸς καὶ τῆς καρδίας αὐτοῦ ἐπίσκοπος ἀληθῆς καὶ τῆς γλώσσης ἀκουστῆς).

124 Mark 5:33: ἡ δὲ γυνὴ φοβηθεὶσα καὶ τρέμουσα, εἶδοτα ὅ γέγονεν αὐτῇ, ἔλθεν καὶ προσέπεσεν αὐτῷ καὶ
but more importantly worship and reverence for the divine.\(^{125}\) Claiming to comport his own body after the fashion of the New Testament figure, the poet models the subjectivity of one filled with “amazement of the heart” (ἐν κατανύξει καρδίας) proper to all in light of the universal condition of sin.\(^{126}\) Once again we see how the psychosomatic unity of the individual locates spiritual reformation within the body, namely the heart.

In the opening lines to his mēmrā, Jacob of Serugh offers prayers to God, praising the divine “physician” (ܐܣܝܐ), the “medicine of life” (ܣܥܘܕܐ ܐܕܚܝ), and “treasury of the Father” (ܓܓܗ ܕܐܒܐ). Within this litany of verses, Jacob beseeches God to heal him so that he might better offer the praise of his words, foregrounding medicinal imagery as a way of foreshadowing the contents of the work. Like Romanos, Jacob seeks healing, but his petitions emphasize his artistic vocation in addition to modeling abject dependence on divine sustenance. God is the muse sanctioning poetic composition and inspiring mellifluous speech. Jacob introduces us to the Hemorrhaging woman through embedding her story within a host of New Testament narratives, chiefly those of healing and Jesus’s

\[ \text{εἴπεν αὐτῷ πάσαν τὴν ἄλλης εἰς } \frac{8}{15} \text{ Luke 8:47: } \text{idούσα δὲ ἡ γυνὴ ἢ ὅτι οὐκ ἔλαβεν, τρέμουσα ἠλθεν καὶ προσπεθοῦσα (feminine aorist nominative participle) αὐτῷ δι’ ἣν αἰτιῶν ἦνοτο αὐτῶ προστέθηκεν ἐνώπιον παντὸς τοῦ λαοῦ, καὶ ὡς ἱάθη παραχρῆμα. Transforming the tense from the aorist to the present, Romanos brings the action of falling down and worshiping into the present.} \]

\(^{125}\) Cf. Ps 94 (95): 6 “O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!” (δεῦτε προσκυνήσωμεν καὶ προσπέσωμεν αὐτῷ καὶ κλαύσωμεν ἐναντίον κυρίου τοῦ ποιήσαντος ἡμᾶς \( )^{126}\) Heinrich Greeven, “κατανύσσω, κατάνυξις,” TDNT 3.626. Romanos’s selection of the term, κατάνυξις, suggests intentionality on his part. The term only appears once in the New Testament, within Romans 11:8 Paul uses it in reference to Israel, “God gave to them a spirit of deep sleep” (πνεῦμα κατανύξεως), also rendered “spirit of stupefaction.” As Greeven notes, Paul’s language alludes to Is 29:10, implying that the “hardening of the heart” was the work of God himself. The related verb in the Septuagint, κατανύσσεσθαι “is used for various states in which the free will of the one concerned is more or less obliterated” to indicate such things as “horror” (Gen 34:7), “contrition” (Sir 14:1). Greeven adds that outside the Septuagint the word is only used in Christian literature. In modern Greek it has a less negative overtone and can mean reverence.
encounters with women. Highlighting the magnanimity of Christ for all those who petition him, the poet orients the listener to understand her story within a larger canonical narrative. At this point the poet resumes the first person to explain his position vis-à-vis the biblical narrative:

This woman, who is full of faith, has called on me today to relate her story, as I wonder. This woman who became a teacher for herself, And she knew that she would bind up her great sore and it would be healed. This woman in whom Jesus depicted a type for His own teaching: How the unclean, if they call upon Him, will be cleansed by Him.

These verses of authorial self-presentation set forth the themes that Jacob will explore throughout the rest of the mēmrā, but they demonstrate subtle differences from Romanos. Within the particularity of this woman’s experience, larger spiritual truth is to be found. Here Jacob stands in wonder, at this woman’s experience, but he does not explicitly assume her abjectness in the way we saw with Romanos’s prooimium. Jacob forges a relationship with the woman herself as she calls upon him to tell her story; the poet participates in promulgating her memory among the generations of Christians who

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127 This verb “to call, summon” (ܩܪܐ) is identical to the verb often used for those who call out to Jesus for his healing and attention.
128 Or: “And she knew how to bind up her great sore so that it would be healed.”
129 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” V.529.77-82; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 186.
will remember her. As Jacob delineates the extraordinary qualities of this woman, he emphasizes the agency she demonstrates through her story: she is her own teacher (ܡܠܦܢܝܬܐ), but she also is her own healer since she knows how to bind her own wound. In her capacity as a teacher she becomes a “type” (ܛܘܦܣܐ) who can serve as a model for all who hear her story, specifically the unclean in need of divine cleansing.

2.6 Conclusions

While scholarship on early Christianity has emphasized different facets of ascetic discourse, the slippery and diffuse language of purity and impurity runs throughout this literature. The persistence of anxieties around women’s bodies represents one particularly charged node within this larger discourse, and the inconsistent views found within Church orders and ecclesiastical literature attest to the irresolution of authorities around these questions. Writing about the Latin-speaking West, Dyan Elliott observes that ritual pollution and sex demonstrate that “Certain discursive zones attract attention to themselves by their extremes of repetition or emotional intensity, revealing the persistence of a sensitivity that is noteworthy even when one grants the intractability of past discourses.”

Elliott’s observations apply to Late Antiquity as authors continued to negotiate the presence of the female body within ecclesial space.

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130 Dyan Elliott, *Fallen Bodies: Pollution, Sexuality, and Demonology in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), 1. Elliott argues that Christian sexual taboos around the female body were part of a larger suspicion of erotic impulses, evidence of “pollution anxiety’s grim hold” (2). While this study is helpful for showing the longue durée of this discourse, the approach tends to homogenize Jewish discourses and overlook precedents in the larger Greco-Roman world.
Both ancient and modern interpretations of her story invoke Christian constructions of Judaism as oppressively legalistic, contributing to their listeners’ views of their Jewish contemporaries. How Christians manipulate the language of purity and relate Jesus’s message has implications for their explicit readings as well as their implicit understanding of how emergent Christianity relates to an equally emergent Jewish “other.” Found at the intersection of gender politics and religious polemics, Christian reflection on issues of purity represents a facet of the “gendering of Christian culture” that remains underrepresented in scholarship on women in these early centuries.¹³¹

Within the history of Christianity, prescribed ritual behavior and social isolation for menstruating women appears infrequently in literature. Often these statues and statements are heard as lingering, unresolved echoes of earlier biblical discourses exemplified by Leviticus 15:19-33. Interpreters of the Gospel narrative of the Hemorrhaging woman have often shared this approach, assuming that Leviticus is the hermeneutical “key” for understanding the pericope. Examples of Christians debating the purity of women has been presented as a failure to fully realize Jesus’s example of rejecting such strictures in texts such as that of the Hemorrhaging woman.¹³²

In the liturgical poetry examined above, Romanos blends the language of moral and bodily impurity breathlessly throughout his kontakion on the woman with a flow of

¹³¹ Fonrobert, Menstrual Purity, 165.
¹³² Janice Delaney, Mary Jane Lupton, and Emily Toth, The Curse: A Cultural History of Menstruation (University of Illinois, 1988), 37-44. This early overview does not engage with Christian materials in depth, but it is a prime example of how earlier treatments assume both that the ailment of the Hemorrhaging woman is excessive menstruation and also that the prescriptions of Leviticus are pertinent to understanding the encounter.
blood. Jacob’s language for pollution allows him to attend more carefully to the illness of this woman and the suffering she has endured. For modern feminist interpretation of the pericope, the Syriac reception of the text represents a distinct trajectory for understanding the female body as ritually impure without necessitating the connotations of sin so often associated with early Christian use of purity discourse.

2.7 Afterword

Whether rendered in visual art or performed through poetry, New Testament narratives featuring women were malleable materials for the construction of ideal Christian selves. This chapter began with an example from the iconography of the Hemorrhaging woman, and I return to this same amulet at the conclusion of this chapter. On the reverse of the amulet is a figure whose identity art historians have debated. In contrast to the woman clutching Jesus’s hem, here a woman is depicted as an orant flanked by two palm trees. Within the secondary literature scholars have debated this woman’s identity: is she the woman from the Gospel after her healing? Or is she an image of the woman who owned the amulet? If this figure is indeed the Hemorrhaging woman, she bears a striking resemblance to the self-assertive, confident woman we encounter in the poetry of Jacob and Romanos. Her upright bearing and outstretched hands communicate her self-possession and expressiveness. This prayerful figure reminds us that the Nachleben of New Testament women across visual media and literary genres was multifaceted.

This Gospel text, along with its female protagonist, continues to challenge commentators, both ancient and modern. Over the centuries, the woman’s enigmatic silence and trepidation pique readers’ (and listeners’) curiosity. The multifarious ways interpreters have “read” her character reflect later assumptions and preoccupations concerning the gendered body. In the eastern Mediterranean of the fifth and sixth centuries Christian authors attended to the personal history and embodied experience of this woman. Through giving her a voice, late ancient poets translated her suffering and pain into heart-felt, impassioned language. Poets – inhabiting this woman’s voice –
provided the Christian listener with a script for understanding their own physical and spiritual illnesses. In the communal worship of Constantinople and the region of Edessa and Serugh, this woman stood and spoke for all to hear.
3. A Daughter of the Peoples: Gendering the “Church of the Nations”

Be careful, my son, Jacob, that you do not take a wife from any of the seed of the daughters of Canaan,
Because all of his seed is (destined) for uprooting from the earth;
Because through the sin of Ham, Canaan sinned,
And all of his seed will be blotted out from the earth, and all his remnant,
And there is none of his who will be saved.

- Jubilees 22:20-21

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to the promise.

- Galatians 3:28-29

3.1 Israel and Her Neighbors

As a poet and teacher of exegesis, Narsai dedicated few poems to biblical episodes featuring female protagonists, but at some point in his lengthy career he turned to the text of Matthew 15:21-28, the narrative of the Canaanite woman’s encounter with Jesus. Through voluminous description and imagined speech, Narsai instructs the listener to see in the Canaanite woman the transformative potential of faith as she, “even a small bird, weak of wing, broke the snare” of idolatry and sin. Throughout his mēmrā,

2 Sebastian Brock, “A Guide to Narsai’s Homilies,” Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies 12, no. 1 (2009): 21-40. I will refer to the oldest extant manuscript, Diyarbakir Ms. 70 (D70) f. 204r-212r. This manuscript may be found at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library under Chaldean Cathedral (Mardin) 578. For a fuller account of the manuscript tradition of this previously unpublished mēmrā see the edition and full translation of the text in Appendix A.
3 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 212r.
Narsai returns repeatedly to the woman’s identity as a Canaanite to highlight the extraordinary nature of her faith as well as her exemplarity for his fellow believers.

For Narsai, as well as for Jacob of Serugh and Romanos, meditation on the Gospel narratives of non-Israelite women demands the interpreter reflect on ethnic and religious differences. As we shall see, the characterizations of these women – both in the biblical text and in later poetic re-narrations – acquire depth through projecting the connotations of their gendered identity through the prism of ethno-religious vocabulary and attendant stereotypes. Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos narrated and expanded the New Testament episodes in light of a biblical historiography that contained within itself the textual layers of a larger “signifying system” of the scriptures. Through underscoring enduring markers of human difference, poets enlivened their dynamic portraits of biblical women and displayed a nimble intertextual approach to their biblical sources.

Jewish scriptures, whether later deemed canonical or apocryphal, are a chorus of voices, some harmonious and others contrapuntal. Over centuries and within shifting

4 Ross Kraemer, “The Other as Woman: An Aspect of Polemic among Pagans, Jews, and Christians in the Greco-Roman World,” in The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity, eds. Laurence J. Silberstein, and Robert L. Cohn (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 144. Kraemer suggests that the choice of a woman as a convert “may reflect the idea of the Other as woman and the Self as male, where a complete transformation of identity from the Other to the Self requires the element of gender as well.” Although New Testament scholars point out that the narrative of the Canaanite woman does not reflect a clear “conversion,” later Christian interpretation reads this pericope as fundamentally transformative.

5 Given the religious and cultural components of the terms “Canaanite” and “Samaritan” for these late antique authors, I think the hybrid term “ethno-religious” gestures to the fact that these markers function as indicators of cultural and religious practices. Terminology and conceptual framework will be discussed fully below.

6 Daniel Boyarin, Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 94.

7 We must be careful to avoid the language of fixity or canon in describing the fluid state of ancient Jewish texts especially in the Second Temple Period. Important overviews include Hindy Najman, “The Vitality of
historical contexts the “creation, definition, and interpretation” of these sacred texts served as a ground for competition over authority and religious conviction. Within this body of literature, the myths of a universal creation and humanity’s common ancestry exist alongside the theme of Israel’s elected status and particular covenantal relationship with God. In the process of self-conception and definition, Israelite scribes and authors were often moved to theorize the “other,” the non-Israelite. Interlacing their observations with value-laden assessments, authors of texts such as Jubilees sought to establish religious and political hierarchies within their narrative of Israel’s history.

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9 Jon D. Levenson, “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism,” in *Ethnicity and the Bible* ed. Mark G. Brett (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 148-149. Levenson cites the covenant with Noah Gen 9:1-17 as evidence of this larger sensibility within the Bible. It is important for Levenson that the term “universal” is grounded in the nature of creation and a lack of geographical specificity to God’s power.


11 Jonathan Klawans, “Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism,” *Association of Jewish Studies Review* 20 no. 2 (1995): 285-312. Texts concerning ritual, moral, and genealogical purity have been a fertile ground for understanding the idealization of communal boundaries and interactions. Reassessment of the evidence has led to increased precision about the categories employed. Klawans cautions, “Though Gentiles were considered to be morally impure from a much earlier date, this conception did not cause Jews to consider contacts with Gentiles to be ritually defiling. Thus, it is an error to assume that Jews in ancient times generally considered Gentiles to be ritually defiling, and it is even more of an error to assume that such a conception would have been an impediment to Jewish-Gentile interaction” (288). See also Christine Hayes, “Intermarriage and Impurity in Ancient Jewish Sources,” *Harvard Theological Review* 92 no. 1 (1999): 3-36. Hayes has further argued that Second Temple sources such as Ezra and the book of Jubilees are more concerned with preserving the “holy seed” of Israel, and the ban on intermarriage reflects this concern rather than ritual purity. A more recent treatment is Adi Ophir and Ishay Rosen-Zvi, *Goy: Israel’s Multiple Others and the Birth of the Gentile* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).
Geopolitical and social distances conditioned the ideological investment and prescriptive tenor of these passages. In the words of Jonathan Z. Smith, “The radically ‘other’ is merely ‘other’; the proximate ‘other’ is problematic, and hence, of supreme interest.” As a polemical and rhetorical tactic, discursive binaries project clarity and obscure commonalities, essentializing the “other” and reducing cultural and religious difference to core traits.

Authors composing in Hebrew and Greek wedded such efforts at boundary construction and maintenance to gendered metaphors. As well as amplifying the rhetorical power of their message, invoking women as symbols of the community introduced the very ambiguities associated with the sexed body as well as the potential for envisioning exclusivity. The symbolization of the community within the Hebrew Bible, for instance, was two-fold. Israel could be figured as a woman whose purity (or

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12 Not all “Gentiles” are considered as equally threatening to the survival of Israel. Shaye Cohen points out that within the Torah itself the prohibitions against intermarriage with Gentiles single out the seven Canaanite nations especially (Dt 7:3-4 and Ex 34:15) (“From the Bible to the Talmud The Prohibition of Intermarriage,” Hebrew Annual Review 7 (1983), 23-39). According to Louis Epstein, Exposure to Canaanite customs through intermarriage was largely feared for how such intimate relationships might lead to apostasy and idolatry (Marriage Laws in the Bible and Talmud (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1942),158). For Klawans, it is this understanding of “Gentiles” as idol worshippers and religious deviants that will inform Christian readings of these texts. The rise of rabbinic Judaism produces a profound shift in the conceptualization of Gentile impurity that brings to the forefront questions of ritual impurity (“Notions of Gentile Impurity in Ancient Judaism,” 302). See also Jacob Neusner, A History of the Mishnaic Law of Purities, 22 vols (Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1974-1977).


14 Sherry B. Ortner, “The Virgin and the State,” Feminist Studies 4, no. 3 (1978): 23. In this classic essay, Ortner outlines how “the purity of women was structurally, functionally, and symbolically bound up with” the development of the stratified societal structures.
impurity) reflected the people’s faithfulness to God. On the other hand, authors expressed anxieties over group identity and posited the ideal of endogamy through crafting the figure of the “foreign woman” leading the righteous astray from orthopractic religious observance.

In light of these earlier voices, New Testament authors narrated the ministry of Jesus and the early decades of the fledgling Jesus movement by actively formulating and debating the significance of the Incarnation for Israel and the “Nations.” The biblical archive provided inchoate, flexible categories for subsequent interpreters to apply to their contemporary world. As late antique writers molded nascent Christian belief and constructed Christian selves, they drew upon this treasury of images, transforming opposition to outsiders both real and rhetorically crafted into a catalyst for creative thought. Later Christian readers, unwilling to excise troublesome texts from their sacred

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15 Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Examining six roles women occupy within Judges alone, Susan Ackerman’s methodologically careful study uses comparative data drawn from the religious literature and practices of ancient Israel to contextualize these representations of women. Ackerman asserts that while such representations do not provide access to the historical reality of women, they do allow scholars to pose the question: “what are the theological and ideological influences and suppositions concerning women – more simply put, what are the religious beliefs – that motivated the biblical writers to craft their portraits of Judges’ women in the ways that they did?” (15). For the purposes of better understanding the artistic and theological character of individual authors, it is also important to underscore places where writers depart from or critically develop received traditions.

16 There has been extensive study of the foreign seductress in, for example, Proverbs 1-9, Ezra-Nehemiah, and Deuteronomy. See Nancy Nam Hoon Tan, *The ‘Foreignness’ of the Foreign Woman in Proverbs 1-9: A Study of the Origin and Development of a Biblical Motif* (De Gruyter, 2008), 167-168.

17 David G. Horrell, “‘Race’, ‘Nation’, ‘People’: Ethnic Identity-Construction in 1 Peter 2.9,” *New Testament Studies* 58 (2011): 135. Horrell argues that the 1 Peter 2 contains some of the most explicit “ethnoracial description of Christian identity in the whole NT, and this initiates an influential discourse about ethnicity and ‘race’ in early Christian writing.” I will return to Horrell’s explication of the semantic range of the Greek terms for racial and ethnic categories later when I examine the Syriac translation of this vocabulary.

18 Scholarship on early Christianity in recent decades has demonstrated that Christianity did not spring from a single source but rather developed through ongoing contestation of authority and biblical interpretation.
scriptures, developed interpretative strategies to render discordant biblical passages and
themes productive for their theological and ascetic projects.\textsuperscript{19} As the centuries wore on,
Christians understood references to Israel and its neighbors in their authoritative texts in
ever-evolving ways, reconciling seemingly contradictory passages.\textsuperscript{20} Just as earlier
Israelite interpreters had looked to gendered representations of difference, so too the New
Testament accounts of the non-Israelite women encountering Jesus, specifically the
Canaanite woman (Mt 15:21-28) and the Samaritan woman (John 4:4-42), acted as key
nodes for Christian interpreters. Straddling various historical time periods, these

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\textsuperscript{19} Elizabeth A. Clark, \textit{Reading Renunciation: Asceticism and Scripture in Early Christianity} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999): 10-11. As Clark demonstrates, “exegetical work” needed to be performed to reconcile the divergent messages of Scripture regarding the sexuality and procreation, and ascetic interpreters produced readings that advanced their agendas. Jerome and Origen, for example, read the biblical text in light of commitments to the ascetic project and saw the overall trajectory of the biblical text as supporting their efforts. Applying these insights to examining the intersection of exegesis and the discursive practice of boundary inscription (and erasure), we see how early Christians practiced a flexible hermeneutic that harnessed passages in support of larger ideological programs.

\textsuperscript{20} While many scholars have observed the “universalist” posture of Christian rhetoric, Marc Hirshman has noted strains within the Rabbinic literature of the second and third centuries that underscores the special status of Gentiles and their ability to access the Torah without conversion (“Rabbinic Universalism in the Second and Third Centuries,” \textit{The Harvard Theological Review} 93, no. 2 [2000]: 101-115).
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discourses of difference produced directives of proper religious practice and morality while also cultivating notions of bounded social groups.\textsuperscript{21}

Among the unnamed New Testament women under investigation, early Christian as well as modern interpreters have focused on the specific and significant “ethnic” categories and lineages attributed to the Canaanite Woman and the Samaritan Woman.\textsuperscript{22} As depicted by the authors of the Gospels, these women experience multiple forms of marginalization, not only as women but more specifically as women associated with groups beyond the boundaries of Israel.\textsuperscript{23} The Gospel authors subverted their reader’s

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\item \textsuperscript{21} Levenson, “The Universal Horizon of Biblical Particularism,” 158-159. It is important to note that the election of Israel and distinctions drawn between it and the “nations” are not altogether negative. As Jon Levenson stresses, elected status may be understood as a call to serve, and other nations are not necessarily distinguished by negative characteristics.
\item \textsuperscript{22} I employ the term “ethnicity” and its cognates here provisionally. Understanding race and ethnicity as terms of social organization and classification that are constructed and provisional, I show how Christian interpreters interpret and theorize the terms “Canaanite” and “Samaritan” as constructed identities within the literature of the Old and New Testaments. Ethnicity has been variously defined and conceptualized within the fields of sociology and anthropology. The “primordialist” or “essentialist” viewpoints associated with Edward Shils and Clifford Geertz emphasize the stability of ethnic identity through kinship, land, and shared customs. See Edward Shils, “Primordial, Personal, Sacred, and Civil Ties,” \textit{British Journal of Sociology} 8 (1957): 130-145; Clifford Geertz, \textit{The Interpretation of Cultures} (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 255-310. To study the employment of the categories of race and ethnicity requires further reflection on the terms themselves and the worldviews they imply. Richard H. Thompson, \textit{Theories of Ethnicity: A Critical Appraisal} (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989).
\item \textsuperscript{23} By assuming a universal voice for women’s lived experience, earlier feminist critique often obscured the ways that race, class, and gender formed a mutually enforcing matrix of oppression. Applying these insights to the New Testament allows us to capture more fully the positionality of these female characters. See Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” \textit{University of Chicago Law Forum} 1 (1989): 139-167; Anna Carastathis, “The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory,” \textit{Philosophy Compass} 9 no. 5 (2014): 304-314; Leslie McCall, “The Complexity of Intersectionality,” \textit{Signs} 30 no. 3 (2005): 1771-1800; Jennifer C. Nash, “Re-thinking Intersectionality,” \textit{Feminist Review} 89 (2008): 1-15. Nash counters the charge that intersectionality’s flaw is its “methodological murkiness” by charting ways to draw attention to the dangers of categorization and essentializing tendencies. For the explicit extension of intersectional approaches to include ethnic and class divisions along with race and gender, see Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis, “Contextualizing Feminism – Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions,” \textit{Feminist Review} 15 (1983): 62-75. It is vital to acknowledge the concerns of feminists both within the United States and Europe about the misappropriation and misapplication of intersectionality. Academic discourse, these scholars claim, has often undercut the political potential and historical grounding of
\end{itemize}
expectations by rendering these women receptive to Jesus’s message, overturning assumptions about peoples traditionally perceived as hostile to Israel. In later Christian interpretation of these female figures, the transformation of the once “othered” peoples into models of faith fostered reflection on the status of the Christian church in relationship to the history of Israel.

Within Syriac Christianity, the identity of the church as the “people from the peoples” (‘ammā d-men ‘ammē) has been studied as an organizing principle within the writings of Aphrahat and Ephrem, but later poets have received little attention for how this theme was received and developed. This chapter examines how the poetry of Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos depicted the Samaritan woman and the Canaanite woman consistently as models for the Christian self – and by extension the Christian community by underscoring their ethnoreligious identities in tandem with their gender. While Narsai will rehearse the thick webs of kinship and the legacies of genealogy that ensnare the Canaanite woman, Jacob will layer binaries to construct an anti-Jewish polemic. Romanos depicts the Samaritan woman as a dynamic “type” for the church and a model for the faithful. All three poets depict these women as conscious of their marginal status and articulate advocates on their own behalf, an interpretative angle more intersectionality. As Silma Bilge observes: “The whitening of intersectionality is a process with actors and actresses. It is materialized in our university work, our citation practices, our authorities praising theory (generally) and having contempt for activist scholars, [and] our fetishizing of methodology” (“Le blanchiment de l’intersectionnalité,” Recherches féministes 28, no. 2 (2015): 8).

suited to the poetic genre than to prose. While their readings resonate with earlier homiletic and commentary traditions, their sustained poetic treatments offer historians of New Testament reception insight into the ways “Canaanite” and “Samaritan” ethno-religious labels were performed and explicated for late antique Christian audiences. Placing previous work on the “theological ethnography” of Syriac authors into conversation with broader discussions of early Christian practices of “ethnic reasoning,” this chapter extends our topography of the late ancient construction and invocation of social categories.\(^{25}\) As late antique and early Byzantine poets embedded these female figures within the larger trajectory of Israel’s history, they constructed the non-Israelite woman as a canvas for projections of an idealized Christian self, marked by spiritual receptivity and pious boldness in pursuit of faith.

\(^{25}\) Young, “The ‘Church from the Nations,’” 14-15. Young’s article deepens Murray’s analysis by focusing on how Ephrem’s writings contain “sporadic” but significant instances of local knowledge concerning the customs and particular attributes of various groups such as the citizens of Nicomedia and Nisibis. His attention to particularity is balanced by a sustained interest in the eventual inclusion of all the nations within the church, a cornerstone of his polemics against the disbelief of his Jewish contemporaries. The voluminous literature on the significance of race and ethnicity for ancient texts contains a variety of viewpoints. The omnipresent emphasis on universality within Christian discourse subsumes differences within a projected vision of unity. In contrast to the impulse to preserve difference, the undertones of inclusion and assimilation can serve to relativize or de-legitimize social frameworks based on “ethnic” or linguistic identities. Guy Stroumsa, for instance, downplays the significance of ethnic categories for Christian writers: “Since early Christianity did not form a culture of its own, and did not claim to represent an ethnical entity of any kind, the Christians had to invent new parameters according to which they could fashion their own identity” (“Philosophy of the Barbarians: On Early Christian Ethnological Representations,” in Geschichte, Tradition, Reflexion: Festschrift für Martin Hengel zum 70. Geburtstag, 3 vols. (Tübingen: Mohr, 1996), II.339-368, esp. 341); Joshua Fishman Language and Ethnicity in Minority Sociolinguistic Perspective (Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters, 1989), 9-65, 51. Fishman describes Christianity as a “de-ethnicizing movement.” In contrast, Denise Buell has framed this tension as one between fixity and fluidity of categories in Why This New Race: Ethnic Reasoning in Early Christianity (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005). For Buell, early Christians deployed the concepts of race and ethnicity selectively to bolster their persuasive rhetoric. Whereas authors often fashioned the boundaries of the church as permeable through conversion and accessible to faith, they projected an increasingly rigid view of rhetorically constructed Jewish identity, fixed through the concepts of race and ethnicity (6).
3.2 Case Study: The Canaanite Woman

One of the underlying tensions within the New Testament is the scope of Jesus’s ministry and his significance for those outside of Israel, the “Gentiles.”26 Within the Gospel attributed to Matthew, for example, Jesus tells his disciples not to enter any town of the Samaritans (10:5), but in the wake of the resurrection, commissions them to “go and make disciples among all the nations (τὰ ἔθνη)” (28:19).27 For the biblical writers such markers carried explanatory value, and they relied on their reader sharing a socially and culturally conditioned repertoire of associations and stereotypes. Within the context of Matthew, the healing narrative of the Centurion’s child (Mt 8:5-13), read in conjunction with the healing of the Canaanite woman’s daughter, demonstrates the extraordinary faith found among the Gentiles.28 Long after the composition of the New Testament, these narrative details continued to animate the imaginations of later readers

26 Margaret M. Mitchell, “Gentile Christianity,” in Origins to Constantine, eds. Margaret M. Mitchell and Frances M. Young, The Cambridge History of Christianity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 103-124. According to Mitchell multiple “sociological maps” were operative during the first-century, but they shared a common binary worldview. For the present study it is significant that some groups (like the Samaritans) blurred oppositional boundaries, and certainly those deemed “Gentiles” from various Jewish points of view did not conceive of themselves through such categories (104-105). The contrast with Greek ethnography, mirrored by later Christian writers such as Epiphanius, creates an interesting contrast. For a classic study see Elias J. Bickerman, “Origenes Gentium,” Classical Philology 47, no. 2 (1952): 65-81. While Bickerman overdraws the contrast between Biblical and Greek approaches, his observations about the adoption of Greek historiography by peoples within the Hellenistic world is suggestive for Syriac historiography.

27 Mt 28:19 πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τὰ ἔθνη; Often the question of Matthew’s orientation to the Gentiles has been posed in the context of studies concerning the author’s concern to underscore the Jewish identity of Jesus.

and interpreters living at a remove from the places and time periods where the biblical text was written. These authors deployed stereotypes around the “imagined communities” of the Canaanites and Samaritans not only to explain the text within its immediate context but also extended these assumed characteristics to unbelievers among the poets’ contemporaries. In Late Antiquity, Syriac- and Greek-speaking Christians attended to markers of identity in the biblical narrative through intertextual reading strategies, culling their scriptures for references to these peoples and tracing lines of ancestry.

The contours of Matthew’s characterization come into sharp relief when read alongside the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mark 7:24-50. The author of Mark contends that Jesus, “arose and departed for the region of Tyre” (7:24) and entered a house. Despite his desire to remain unnoticed, Jesus encounters a woman “whose daughter had an unclean spirit.” Upon entering a house, Jesus encountered a woman who was both Greek (Ἐλληνίς) and a Syro-Phoenician (Συροφοινίκισσα) by race (τῶ γένει). Her two-

29 Benedict Anderson, Imaged Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised edition (London: Verso, 2006), 6. To employ the observation of Benedict Anderson, characteristics of a nation or group contribute to the sense of an “imagined community.” While most individuals “will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their community” as well we could add, images of external “imagined” communities.


31 Mk 7:25 ἀλλ᾽ εὐθὺς ἀκούσα γυνὴ περὶ αὐτοῦ, ἧς εἶχεν τὸ θυγάτριον αὐτῆς πνεῦμα ἀκάθαρτον, ἐλθοῦσα προσέπεσεν πρὸς τοὺς πόδας αὐτοῦ (“But immediately a woman whose small daughter had an unclean spirit heard about him, (and) she came and fell down before his feet”).

32 Mk 7:26 ἡ δὲ γυνὴ ἦν Ἐλληνίς, Συροφοινίκισσα τῶ γένει.
fold identity is presented as an enduring quality that will color the narrative that follows. Neither Narsai’s nor Jacob’s poems show definitive proof that they engaged with the text of Mark, but the translation history of the Markan text shows an interest in the woman’s identity. The Antioch Bible edition of the Peshitta Mark, reflecting later manuscripts and emendations, renders 7:26: “The woman happened to be a pagan from Syrian Phoenicia” (ܕܣܘܪܝܐ ܝܩܐ ܢ ܦܘܡܢܫܐ ܡܢܛܝܚܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܕܝܢ ܗܝ). Representing traditions closer to the fifth century, The Old Syriac version contained in the Sinaitic ms. retains a different reading of 7:26: “She was a widow from the border of Tyre of Phoenicia” (ܦܘܢܝܩܐ ܕ ܕܨܘܪܬܚܘܡܐ ܡܢ ܗܘܬ ܐܪܡܠܬܐ ܐܢܬܬܐ ܗܝ). Whereas the reading adopted in the Antioch Bible departs from the Greek text to underscore the Syrian location of encounter, the additional identification of the woman as a “widow” appears to be an aberrant reading or pious addendum to the narrative. This shift is significant for the present study in that it shows a shifting textual tradition around her identity based on the translation of ‘Ελληνίς. In his commentary on Mark, Joel Marcus shows consistency in the use of the term ‘Ελληνίς to denote Gentile status or belonging to the nations within the Greek text of the Pauline epistles and Mark, but this consistency is not mirrored in the

33 Buell, Why This New Race, 15-19. An essential part of Buell’s contribution to the study of race and ethnicity in antiquity is her insistence that “race” is equally constructed and relative a term as ethnicity. She rejects modern attempts to render race as “fixed” and ethnicity as a more fluid category. My use of the term race for γένος and people or nation for ἔθνος is to keep these two Greek terms distinct and highlight how they are transformed in the process of textual transmission into Syriac.
35 Neither Narsai nor Jacob raise the issue of the woman’s marital status; the variant is interesting for the textual fluidity it demonstrates, but it is beyond the scope of the present inquiry.
Syriac translations. The Peshitta employs “gentile” or “heathen” (ClearColor) for the Gospel text while using the more general term for pagan or Aramean (ClearColor) in the epistles of Paul, rendering the Greek term through strictly religious terminology. Thus we must be sensitive to how Syriac translators rendered a single Greek term differently depending on the narrative location and how these usages reflect the semantic ranges of these terms diverging or overlapping.

activities to identify competition between groups and the maintenance of boundaries.\textsuperscript{39} When material and historical evidence is read alongside the literary record, the strident tone of biblical authors arguing for a distinction between Israel and the “Canaanites” may be heard all the more clearly.

The significance of this woman’s identity as a “Canaanite” has been critical for interpretation of the Matthean text. Without the resources of archaeology and modern biblical scholarship, early Christian authors culled their available resources and extant bodies of knowledge to identify who these people were and what else was meant by the label. The frequent appearance of the Canaanites in the texts of their Old Testament provided Christians much needed clues about how to understand this Gentile woman.

Within the reception history of this text, two dominant trajectories have been charted: “salvation-history” and “parenetic-existential” interpretations.\textsuperscript{40} In one example from the

\textsuperscript{39} Randall H. McGuire, “The Study of Ethnicity in Historical Archaeology,” \textit{Journal of Anthropological Archaeology} 1 (1982): 160-161; K.L. Noll, “Canaanite Religion,” \textit{Religion Compass} 1 (2007): 62-63. Building on material evidence in conversation with literary witnesses. K. L. Noll rejects the suggestion that Canaanite identity functioned as an identifiable ethnicity. He argues that in ancient texts it is merely a geographical marker “designating a person who is from the land of Canaan,” which was roughly equivalent with the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean, namely the present-day regions of southwestern Syria, Lebanon, Israel, western Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority. Noting the extent to which Canaanite identity and religion are debated among scholars, Noll singles out the complicating factor of biblical accounts of “Canaanites”: “If the Bible’s claim that the Israelites were non-Canaanite migrants to Palestine preserves any genuine memory, then obviously the name provides no evidence for this, nor does archaeology provide unambiguous ethnic data” (64).

\textsuperscript{40} Ulrich Luz, \textit{Matthew 8-20}, 337. In his study of the Syro-Phoenician woman of Mark, Gerd Theissen identifies three types of exegesis: “biographical, paradigmatic, and salvation-history (heilsgeschichtliche).” \textit{Lokalkolorit und Zeitgeschichte in den Evangelien}, Novum Testamentum et Orbis Antiquus 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1989), 62; for the English translation see \textit{The Gospels in Context: Social and Political History in the Synoptic Tradition}, trans. Linda M. Maloney (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 64. As Theissen observes, the biographical approach, which asks specifically what Jesus’s response to the woman reveals about him, has largely fallen out of use.
Western commentary tradition, Hilary of Poitiers uses the Psalms, Deuteronomy, Genesis and Josiah to provide a “historical” context:

But the Canaanites inhabited the lands in which Judaea now is. They were either absorbed by war, or dispersed throughout neighboring places, or subjected to slavery as a conquered people. For they bear only their name, possessing no ancestral land. This people, now mixed with Jews, came from the peoples (gentibus). Because there is not uncertainty that some of those among the crowd who believed were surely proselytes, this Canaanite Woman should rightly be considered a model (formam) of the proselytes because she left her territory, that is, one who transferred her identity from the pagans to another people.41

In this passage, Hilary’s interpretative logic minimizes the degree of difference between the Canaanite Woman and the “Jews.” She is already in the process of conversion in his opinion! While our poets do not use the explicit language of conversion or the fraught category of “proselyte,” they share in common with Hilary a conviction that this woman’s encounter with Christ yielded both the healing of her daughter, and also her own spiritual transformation. The stage of her metanoia is variously depicted. The prevalence of such conversion themes conditions the extent to which ethnic markers bear enduring significance within these texts. As we shall see, both Jacob and Narsai grapple with the historical relationship of the Canaanites to Israel in order to contextualize Jesus’s response and understand the motivations of the woman.

The exegetical legacy of this term enshrines the ethnocentric view of “Canaanite” that Noll challenges using archaeological evidence, but it is the interpretative strain most critical to understanding early Christian usage. The ethnic marker may have had a contemporary connotation in addition to being an archaic biblical label. In his homily on the Matthean pericope, John Chrysostom provides a quintessential example of how Christians were taught to understand the term:

The evangelist denounces the woman, that he may show forth her wonderful act and proclaim her all the more. For when you hear of a Canaanite woman, you should recall those lawless nations who overturned from their foundations the very laws of nature. And being reminded of these, also reflect upon the power of Christ’s advent. For they who were cast out, that they might not pervert the Jews, these appeared more friendly/favorable than the Jews, as even to go out of their boundaries and approach Christ, even while those ones were expelling the one who coming to them.42

The primary significance of the ethnic marker here is to amplify the woman’s extraordinary faith. The image of the Canaanite people physically migrating from their territorial boundaries (ἐκ τῶν ὅριων) materializes their spiritual and religious progression towards the way of life proclaimed in Christ. Born to a people renowned for their wickedness and religious obstinacy, this woman surmounts these challenges and provides a shaming device for preachers who wish to challenge their audiences to realize their

42 John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Matthew* PG 58:519: Κατηγορεῖ τῆς γυναικὸς ὁ εὐαγγελιστὴς, ἵνα δείξῃ τὸ θαῦμα, καὶ αὐτὴν ἀνακηρύξῃ μειζόνως. Καὶ γὰρ ἀκούσας Χαναναῖον, ἀναμνήσθητι τῶν παρανόμων ἐκείνων ἐθνῶν, οἵ καὶ τοὺς τῆς φύσεως νόμους ἐκ βάθρων ἀνέτρεψαν. Μνησθεὶς δὲ αὐτῶν, ἐννόει καὶ τῆς τοῦ Χριστοῦ παρουσίας τὴν δύναμιν. Οἱ γὰρ ἐκβλήθεντες, ἵνα μὴ διαστρέψωσιν Ἰουδαίους, οὕτως τοσοῦτον Ἰουδαίους ἐφάνησαν ἐπιπτηδειότεροι, ὡς καὶ ἔξι ἐναὶ ἐκ τῶν ὅριων, καὶ προσιέναι τὸν Χριστὸν, ἐκείνου καὶ πρὸς αὐτούς ἐρχόμενον ἔλαβον ὁμόνων."

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superior spiritual potential; it is an exegetical trope widely shared by early and late antique Christian authors.

The mēmrē of Narsai and Jacob form a distinct moment in the Syriac reception of this biblical narrative. The Canaanite woman appears sporadically in the poetry of Ephrem, invoked through the imagery of crumbs and dogs.\(^{43}\) While Ephrem shows little interest in the Canaanite woman within his poetry, the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* attributed to Ephrem treats the Matthean pericope within a series of narratives from the Gospel of John.\(^{44}\) It is preceded by the explication of Jesus’s walking upon water (Jn 6:16-24), and his proclamation that he is the bread of life (Jn 6:35-37), when the crowd asks for a sign, specifically manna (Jn 6:30-31). After briefly assembling Jesus’s teachings on honoring one’s parents (Mt 15:4), the *Commentary* treats the Canaanite woman’s narrative directly before that of the Samaritan woman.\(^{45}\) In his poetic re-telling of the woman’s plea for her demon-possessed daughter, Narsai embeds her story within the larger plight of humanity beset by the forces of Satan as well as the particular history of the Canaanite people.


\(^{44}\) Concerning the authorship of the *Commentary*, see Christian Lange, *The Portrayal of Christ in the Syriac Commentary on the Diatessaron* (Louvain: Peeters, 2005), esp. 52-55.

Within the trajectories of interpretation mapped by Ulrich Luz, Narsai and Jacob combine elements of “salvation-history” with “parenetic-existential” approaches. For both poets, construction of the woman’s Canaanite identity is essential for uncovering the pedagogical and spiritual significance of the text. Narsai deploys a “genealogical reasoning” for understanding the woman’s social location, whereas Jacob deploys an oppositional form of “ethnic reasoning,” pitting the discursively constructed Canaanites against the equally constructed Jewish “Other.” The construction of boundaries between groups calls attention to the performative nature of such labels. According to Rogers Brubaker, membership within an ethnic group is “performative;” individuals reify and create ethnic groups in the act of naming them. 46 As we noted above, individuals may activate particular attributes of a given identity or others might assign such attributes in order to make an ethnic identity’s implications and performance specific to the individual.47

3.2.1 A Pitiable Inheritance: The Canaanite Woman in Narsai

Within Narsai’s extended mēmrā on Matthew 15:21-28, the particularity of the woman’s Canaanite identity instantiates universal realities of sin and bondage to Satan. Narsai establishes these themes at the outset of his poem. Far removed from the particularities of human existence, the first seventy lines relate the machinations of Satan

against an embattled and vulnerable humanity. The very first words of the introduction invoke the menacing power of Satan as “the Hater of people” (ܕܫܡܐ ܐ܇ ܐܢܫ). Obscuring direct references to Genesis 1-3, Narsai foregrounds Satan’s jealousy: “the rebel against humanity clothed himself with the zeal (or jealousy) (ܛܢܢܐ) of anger as to why mortals were called with the name of the (divine) Essence.”

Distributing agency to both Satan and his minions, Narsai depicts a scene of horror and chaos as the forces of evil entice humans to wage war against one another and to forgo the harmony established at creation. Before any distinctions of race or ethnicity are drawn, humanity shares a common plight as Satan “chased after all the peoples (ܝܢܥܡܡ), and made them the food for death.” This enemy sets plots and “snares” (ܐ̈ܢܫܒ) for all peoples indiscriminately, instructing humans in the ways of mutual destruction and unrest. Eschewing references to the events and figures of the Garden of Eden, Narsai emphasizes the universal condition of humanity and clarifies the principal agents within the unfolding drama: Satan and the Incarnate Christ. Narsai’s martial imagery underscores the dim realities of

48 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 204r:

49 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 204r.
50 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 204v:

He taught them (all) sorts of conflict according to his bitterness, and he instructed them how to attack savagely. He wrote a deceitful book in the pages of their minds, that they may read in (it) iniquitously according to his will.
the universal human condition which set the stage for unfolding the story of the Canaanite woman.

Throughout these introductory verses, Narsai establishes the struggle over humanity as primarily a contest between Satan and the Incarnate Word. The dire state of humanity besieged by Satan demands a response from the Creator, leading Narsai to succinctly relate the logic of the Incarnation. Once again martial imagery dominates: “As an army commander [the Creator] armed and sent [his Hint] against the Evil One, so that by his victory his race (ܓܢܣܗ) might be set free from their debts.”51 While I have rendered the Syriac phrase ܐܫܘܪ ܢܣܒ “to set free,”52 the word ܐܫܘܪ possesses a semantic range inclusive of manumission and deliverance, a word that will appear throughout the poem as Narsai discusses freedom. Slavery to sin stands as a universal condition, but Narsai will later claim that the woman’s enslaved status is specifically linked to her Canaanite identity. While Satan entraps and persecutes, Christ liberates with the power of his word.53

Against this backdrop of universal struggle, the Canaanite woman and her

51 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 205r. Narsai uses the Greek loanword ܓܢܣ (Gr. γένος) in the broad sense of the “human race.” This word’s semantic range overlaps somewhat with ܐܝܟ ܪܒ ܚܝܠܐ ܙܝܢ ܫܕܪܗ ܠܘܩܒܠ ܒܝܫܐ܇ ܕܒܙܟܘܬܗ ܢܣܒ ܓܢܣܗ ܚܪܘܪ ܝܗܘܢ܀ ̈ ܚܘܒ, but the latter is reserved for the distinction between the Jews and the Gentiles.

52 Another possible translation may be “to gain freedom” with ܢܣܒ as the subject.

53 For example, Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 205r:

The power of the divine Essence roared in creation through the mouth of a mortal and the ranks of the power of the Evil One and of covetous death shook.

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daughter are ushered onto the “narrative stage” of the recited poem. While martial imagery dominated the introductory verses, the language of slavery comes to the fore as Narsai turns to the New Testament pericope. Her lineage introduces the sordid past of her forefathers and their fractured relationship with the people Israel. Narsai laments the specific lowliness of the Canaanites, suffering under the curse of Noah (Gen 9:20-27). In a threefold litany of questions, Narsai underscores her biblical lineage in her first appearance:

Who taught the daughter of Canaan, the slave of slaves, To go out and ask for freedom from the son of Abram? Who revealed to the Canaanite woman, the daughter of Ham, the accursed one, That the son of Shem is able to break the seal, giving her access to the righteous one? Who revealed to the worshiper of demons, who had been defiled by the demons, That at the voice of Jesus demons flee from their dwelling places?54

The poet’s questions, addressed to the audience, are reminiscent of the rhetorical device of apostrophe. Breaking the narrative rhythm with these interrogative statements, the poet directs his listener to share in the “emotional fabric of the poem,” namely a sense of wonder that a woman within such a lineage could possess her faith.55 These lines also serve as a bridge from the introduction to the more sustained treatment of the Gospel

54 Narsai, Memra 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 205v.
material. The previous statements about the Incarnation remove any ambiguity about the identity of the one who has intervened in the woman’s plight. In Narsai’s re-narration, this pericope within Matthew’s Gospel is framed as an integral part of the larger work of redeeming creation, an example of liberation available to all believers. Although one might understand the woman’s persistence as a struggle with Jesus to overcome his reluctance, Narsai reveals that the real struggle unfolding in Matthew 15 is between the woman and Satan.56

This series of questions also functions to foreground the mother, drawing attention away from the demon-possessed daughter. Narsai contextualizes the woman’s identity as a “Canaanite” through calling attention to Noah’s fateful malediction recounted in Genesis 9:21-27, a dark portrait of filial treachery, paternal anger, and reckless punishment.57 Narsai depicts the woman as a “daughter” of Canaan and Ham, defining her in explicitly relational language to underscore the kinship ties that shape her present condition. This rehearsal of the Canaanite woman’s descent from Ham is not an innocent review of the biblical narrative; in these lines the poet actively frames her

56 The verbal exchange between the woman and Jesus receives fuller analysis in my chapter on the representations of female voices.
57 Numerous scholarly studies have illuminated how later interpreters exploited the identitarian and hierarchical implications of the text to justify enslavement and exploitation of others based on the criteria of race and ethnicity. David M. Goldenberg provides a comprehensive overview in The Curse of Ham: Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003). Goldenberg offers a survey of Jewish, Christian, and Islamic evidence, including passages from Ephrem and Aphrahat. More work remains to be done within Syriac sources on slavery and the Curse of Ham. See also: Jennifer Knust, “Who’s Afraid of Canaan’s Curse? Genesis 9:18-29 and the Challenge of Reparative Reading,” Biblical Interpretation 22 (2014): 388-413. Employing the insights of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Knust queries whether texts such as this passage of Genesis can be read apart from “paranoid” reading strategies.
present situation and circumscribes her future possibilities. Linking the Canaanite
woman to her forebears not only contextualizes her story within the larger biblical
context but also focuses attention on that aspect of her identity for explaining the events
that follow.

Whereas Jacob of Serugh read the Canaanite woman through a binary of the
“people” and the “peoples,” Narsai explores the elaborate ties of kinship that bind the
Canaanite woman to the people of Israel. By drawing this specific intertextual link, the
poet compounds her lowliness: she is enslaved through the curse of Noah and the
shameful act of her forebear. As a reader of Scripture, Narsai fills in the bare details
Matthew provides to add further dimensions to the woman’s character. Transferring her
enslavement from the control of Satan to Jesus invokes the intertwined concepts of
slavery, ethnicity, and gender within the ancient Mediterranean world. This
interpretative turn within Narsai’s poem on the Canaanite woman represents an important

58 Sarah Franklin and Susan McKinnon, “Introduction: Relative Values: Reconfiguring Kinship Studies,” in
59 Numerous scholarly studies have illuminated how later interpreters of the Genesis account of the “Curse
of Ham” (Gen 9:21-27) exploited the identitarian and hierarchical implications of the text to justify
enslavement and exploitation of others based on the criteria of race and ethnicity. In tandem, the study of
slavery within early Christian thought and communal life has shown the complicity of the movement in
perpetuating rigid and unjust social and economic structures, often citing Genesis as textual warrant.
For the role of reception history as well as the social histories that conditioned biblical interpretation see
Jennifer A. Glancy, Slavery in Early Christianity (Oxford University Press, 2002); Chris L. De Wet,
Preaching Bondage: John Chrysostom and the Discourse of Slavery in Early Christianity (University of
California Press, 2015); idem, The Unbound God: Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought
60 Cheryl J. Exum observes that biblical narratives often render women as “fragmentary” and “incomplete,”
allowing readers to supply further details drawn from their expectations. Such supplementation, she argues,
reflects patriarchal societal structures. See Fragmented Women: Feminist (Sub)versions of Biblical
Narratives (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 1997), 47.
61 Ross Kraemer, Unreliable Witnesses: Religion, Gender, History in the Greco-Roman Mediterranean
departure from the larger reception history of her narrative as well as a heretofore unrealized source for the reception of the “Curse of Ham” within Syriac literature. Narsai does not suggest that this slavery is simply metaphorical; the poet lends the woman’s words the authority of one bearing witness to her own suffering. The implications of being a “daughter of Canaan” are made clear through the parallelism identifying her as “a worshipper of demons.” Narsai returns to the woman’s relationship to demons a few lines down as he explores Jesus’s inner deliberations. Narsai posits that Jesus delayed granting the woman’s request to show favor to the “sons of Abraham,” the “circumcised” who murmur and argue against him for “having pity on a slave of demons.” The ethno-religious marker, “Canaanite” becomes synonymous with false worship and idolatry. Weaving together the trope of religious heterodoxy with the imagery of slavery, Narsai advances a thoroughly demonological reading of Genesis 9.

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62 Ephrem alludes to Genesis 9:21-27 in both his prose and poetic works, some of which do not appear in Goldenberg’s overview. While Goldenberg focuses on the specific text of Genesis, it would be wise to read slavery within the work of Ephrem and Aphrahat as a larger phenomenon. The events of Exodus, for example, serve as a particularly important theological precedent for God’s work of salvation. For Ephrem, see Commentary on Genesis VI.1.1-3, VII.1-4, and XI.4; Ser. 1.2.1599; Fid. 9.1–2; HArm. 87b; Nat. 1.23-24, 4.108; Virg. 1.10; Nis. 1.9; Res. 4.5; HNic. 139, 201; Serm. 1.2.1571, 1.2.1599; HArm. 169a; Eccl. 11.2. Often one encounters a moralistic reading of the Genesis text, as evidenced in the hymns of Ephrem on drunkeness preserved in Armenian (HArm. 87b). Aphrahat cites the text when warning his audience about the danger of dissension and division (Dem 14.10, 14.40, 23.14, 23.15).


64 One of the remaining puzzles to examine with this text is the way the text combines the Genesis account of slavery with Pauline concept of ‘slave of Christ.’ In their recent translation of The History of the ‘Slave of Christ,’ or ‘ʽAbdā da-Mšiḥā,” Aaron Butts and Simcha Gross trace the Syriac Nachleben of the Greek term, Χριστόδουλος, an idea imbricated within martyrological narratives and anti-Jewish literature. While this theme is more muted in Narsai’s text, the plea of the woman to transfer her bondage from Satan to the “son of Shem” as the slaveholder is a subtle Pauline allusion. See Aaron Michael Butts and Simcha Gross, trans. and ed. The History of the ‘Slave of Christ’: From Jewish Child to Christian Martyr. Persian Martyr Acts in Syriac 6 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016).
Narsai draws upon the text of Genesis to illuminate the New Testament narrative, raising interesting questions about the expectations and biblical literacy of his audience within the monastic school setting. Employing the exact wording of the biblical text, Narsai’s description of Canaan as the “slave of slaves,” reflects the Peshitta of Genesis 9:25, which closely follows the Hebrew text.\(^65\) If such a description serves to intensify Canaan’s enslaved status within Genesis, Narsai’s attribution of this lineage to a woman goes even further. In his study of the phrase elsewhere in the Syriac Cave of Treasures, Chris de Wet suggests that the phrase operates as “doulological amplification,” further subjugating and dehumanizing the individual.\(^66\) Through the addition of this phrase Narsai posits a hierarchy among slaves, further compounding the woman’s lowliness and conditioning us to hear her words with greater pathos.\(^67\) While the biblical narrative claims that the impetus for her approach was the welfare of her daughter, Narsai suggests a more widespread epidemic among Canaanites due to their idolatry. This is a people exhausted from the punishment of their forbears, as the woman explains: “Enough has the iniquitous tyrant subjected the freedom of our souls.”\(^68\) The dynamic of freedom, impious slavery, and the bonds of genuine worship within this text resonate with Leviticus 25:55

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\(^{65}\) The LXX of Gen 9:25 renders Canaan the slave of his brothers (καὶ εἶπεν· ἐπικατάρατος Χαναάν· παῖς οἰκέτης ἐσται τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ).

\(^{66}\) De Wet, *The Unbound God*, 132-133; de Wet alludes to the slavery of Ham as narrated in *The Cave of Treasures*. For the Syriac text and translation see S.M. Ri, *La Caverne des Trésors: Les deux recensions syriaques*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 486. Leuven: Peeters, 1987; A. Toepel, “The Cave of Treasures,” in *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha: More Noncanonical Scriptures*, ed. R. Bauckham et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2013), 531-584. While de Wet stated the reference in *The Cave of Treasures* is the only reference he had found so far of the Curse of Ham being linked to enslavement to Satan, I have shared with him Narsai’s text as another witness within Syriac literature.

\(^{67}\) Slaves within accounts of Christian martyrdoms would provide further resources for drawing parallels.

\(^{68}\) Narsai, *Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,”* D70 f. 206r.
and freedom positively defined as freedom for worship of God, an emphasis on freedom for worship and servitude to God as noted by historians of Jewish and Roman conceptions of slavery.\textsuperscript{69}

Narsai returns frequently to the woman’s idolatry as a result of her social station, but he spends little time describing her physical appearance and condition. Within these lines cited above, however, Narsai claims that the woman is defiled (ܛܡܐܘܗ), foregrounding her spiritual defilement through bodily imagery and deflecting our attention from the ailing daughter. This departure from the biblical text is suggestive of Narsai’s willingness to test the boundaries of interpretation through imaginative expansions and digressions. Through applying the language of defilement to the Canaanite woman herself, Narsai opens the text to the listener’s preconceptions and assumptions. As scholars of slavery in the ancient world have frequently noted, female slaves were especially vulnerable to sexual abuse and violence.\textsuperscript{70} Our poet may be reflecting the bodily realities of slavery - the infliction of physical and sexual abuse attendant upon enslaved bodies. At the very least, he allows the New Testament figure to gain additional coloring from such a suggestion.


\textsuperscript{70} Taking a material and corporeal turn, Jennifer Glancy’s foundational work has explored how Christian ascetic discourse either interfaced or failed to engage with the conception of slavery and bodies within the ancient world. Jennifer A. Glancy, \textit{Slavery in Early Christianity}; eadem, “Early Christianity, Slavery, and Women’s Bodies,” in \textit{Beyond Slavery: Overcoming its Religious and Sexual Legacies}, ed. Bernadette J. Brooten (Palgrave MacMillan, 2010), 148-149.
Unlike Jacob, Narsai self-consciously develops the term “Canaanite” through referencing the woman’s forbears and citing Noah’s curse upon Ham. Calling Jesus both “Son of David” and “Son of Abram,” she displays the historical memory of her people: “The father (Noah) of your father (Shem) cursed my father (Ham) through the mouth of the Hidden One.” Agency here is dispersed. No longer is Noah responsible for this curse, but the “Hidden One”, operates in background. Foreshadowing Jesus’s praise of the Canaanite woman’s boldness (ܚܘܨܦܐ) of prayer and speech, she describes the transgression of her forefather as that of audacity (ܡܪܚܘܬܐ). This inherited sin awaits the transformation of that trait of boldness through the spiritual discernment of the Canaanite woman.

In her address to Jesus, the Canaanite woman argues that the punishment inflicted by Noah has left her people, most pertinently her daughter, vulnerable to Satan’s abuse. Attempting to bargain with Christ, she challenges: “If the offspring of bold Ham owe the debt of slavery, let them be the slaves to the Son of the just Shem rather than to the tyrant.” The Canaanite Woman never challenges the distinction between the people and the peoples, but instead pleads for a re-evaluation of what such structures signify.

71 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 206r. The identity of the “Hidden One” is ambiguous, and one could argue for either Satan or God, but I would suggest that reading this as a reference to Satan would build a bridge to other verses where the woman claims that Satan is now the slave holder.
73 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f.206r.
After Jesus claims that he has come for the lost sheep of Israel and explains the impro priety of throwing the bread of children to the dogs, the Canaanite Woman takes up the identification of her people with dogs. In a lengthy monologue, Narsai’s Canaanite Woman diminishes the division between the sons who are heirs to the master and the dogs:

Yes, yours is the freedom of the free ones, yet yours are also the sinners, the peaceful dogs. Give food to the free ones as they deserve, and let the dogs live from the crumbs of their tables.\(^{75}\)

Without questioning the divisions and the hierarchy within this household scene, the woman advocates for her people without completely erasing the distinction. A few lines earlier, Jesus claims that Canaanites are “voracious dogs who have not been sated with iniquity,” and here the woman flatly contradicts such a characterization by describing them as ‘peaceful.’\(^{76}\) For the author(s) of the Commentary on the Diatessaron, the Canaanite woman’s story stands as a transformative moment within the course of salvation history. The Commentary’s anti-Jewish polemic becomes clear:

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\(^{75}\) Narsai, *Mēmrā* 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 207r.

He gave (the disciples) proof of the boldness of the love of the peoples; he called them dogs and Israel sons. The peoples, represented as dogs, possessed the boldness of dogs and the love of dogs, but Israel, represented as sons, possessed the wild fury of dogs.77

As we shall see, Jacob’s reading mirrors the Commentary’s binary logic contrasting the faith of the Canaanites with the disbelief of the Jews. This passage, however, shares with Narsai’s poetic re-narration the idea of boldness as a desirable trait. The vocabulary of boldness (ܚܘܨܦܐ) figures prominently in the poet’s interpretative aside:

Not as one unwilling to heal did he turn away and remain silent, but He (wanted) people to gain boldness (ܚܘܨܦܐ) when asking for mercy. By her boldness (ܒܚܘܨܦܗ) He taught everyone to be bold (ܢܚܨܦ) in (asking for) his aid, and not to grow weak if one does not receive (aid) quickly.78

The Canaanite woman’s self-awareness manifests her sense of utter dependence. Her challenge to Jesus’s self-imposed limits involves a thorough confession and praise of his divine magnanimity: “for there is nothing among the created things which does not live from the treasure of your love.”79 Her modesty is compatible with the acceptance of enduring boundaries, but the quality and condition of belonging to her own people would be changed if Jesus were to become her Lord instead of Satan. While Jesus’s rebuke of

77 Louis Leloir, Saint Éphrem: Commentaire de l’Évangile Concordant Texte Syriaque (Manuscript Chester Beatty 709), XII.13; Carmel McCarthy, St. Ephrem’s Commentary on the Diatessaron, 196. [Trans. alt.]
78 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 207v.
79 Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 207r.
the Canaanites as ‘voracious dogs,’ couched in both ethnic and religious slurs, the woman’s reply seeks reconciliation and mutually beneficial co-existence.

The reconciliation between the descendants of Ham and the “free ones” transforms the conditions of human difference without erasing them. This identification of Jesus as the slave master evokes the biblical verse of 1 Corinthians 7:22: “For the one who was called in the Lord being a slave, is the freedman of the Lord; similarly the one who was called free is the slave of the Lord.”

Through her actions and speech, the Canaanite woman performs this type of self-abnegation that is also, paradoxically, the route to freedom from the devil’s oppression.

3.2.2 The Canaanite Woman in the Poetry of Jacob of Serugh

While Narsai begins with the universal condition, Jacob’s “prologue” takes the Incarnation as its immediate starting point. Couched in the imagery of illumination and healing, Christ’s ministry is geographically centered: “He descended like rain on the land of Judah (ܕܝܗܘܕܒܐܪܥܐ) which was sick.”

Whereas Narsai foregrounds the ubiquity of sin and introduces social categories gradually, Jacob is especially concerned with the

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80 1 Cor 7:22 ὁ γὰρ ἐν κυρίῳ κληθεὶς δοῦλος ἀπελεύθερος κυρίου ἐστίν, ὁμοίως ὁ ἐλεύθερος κληθεὶς δοῦλός ἐστιν Χριστοῦ; ܐܬܩܪܝܚܐܪܐܕܒܪܐܝܢܐܗܟܢܐܕܐܠܗܐܗܘܡܚܪܪܐܒܡܪܢܐܬܩܪܝܕܥܒܕܐܓܝܪܐܝܢܐܕܡܫܝܚܐܗܘܥܒܕܐ81

specific people and the land of Judah. Geographical consciousness, a common thread we will also encounter in his poem on the Samaritan woman, informs Jacob’s reading of the text, and he picks up Matthew’s emphasis on Jesus’s movement across territorial boundaries. The journeying Christ embodies the movement of his salvific message and preserves the close relationship between the people and their land.

Narsai slowly introduces the narrative of the Canaanite Woman and the significance of her ethnic identity, but Jacob’s prologue contains a condensed and rhetorically powerful overview of the binary logic through which her story will be interpreted. The first few lines invoke the opposition of the “people” and the “peoples” familiar to readers of Ephrem:

The People hated him while his cure waxed strong,
and while his remedies were many, he was blamed.
The uncircumcised peoples believed in him and in his remedies,
and the circumcised people had doubts about his healing.82

Having previously centered the activity of Jesus in the land of Judah, Jacob returns to the subject at hand: the division between those who recognize the unfolding revelation in Christ’s healings and those who do not. Following a litany of verses about the miraculous healing power of Jesus, the vitriol of his invective is palpable as he depicts the “People”

not only failing to believe but hating (ܣܢܝܗܝ) him. Placing this verb at the beginning of the line gives it greater emphasis, and the attentive ear may catch in its sibilance an echo of the epithet for Satan, “the Hater” (ܣܢܐܐ).

Intensifying the disbelief of the “People,” Jacob introduces a further binary between the “uncircumcised” and the “circumcised.” The performance of “ethnic reasoning” in Jacob’s text involves a kaleidoscopic orchestration of biblically derived ethnic and geographic markers. He captures the “People” in a web of accusation that draws increasingly tighter through a plethora of biblical monikers, summoning the condemnatory rhetoric of Scripture. Moving seamlessly from the macro-level of nations and peoples, Jacob reminds us that the encounter of the Canaanite Woman with Christ encapsulates this struggle:

For the Canaanite Woman, [His] fame was enough for her to believe in Him; For the Daughter of the People, however, not even the Scriptures gave her wisdom to stand firm. His fame excited Tyre and Sidon that He was the Son of God; In Jerusalem he was reviled as being the son of Joseph. In the land of pagans when He passed by with His disciples His faith was sung out by the Canaanite Woman. He passed through the territory of Tyre and Sidon and He fascinated them.

83 The variant reading ܡܬܟܪܙܐ may be preferable “proclaim” which is used with John the Baptist.
and their gods of nothingness began to tremble.  

In a compact series of verses Jacob gives a summary of the themes he will pursue throughout the piece. As a model for the Christian believer, the Canaanite Woman is juxtaposed with the “Daughter of the People.” Casting the two “imagined communities” in competition, his choice of familial language draws these two peoples together through similar gendered symbols; they are daughters, but not as far as our poet argues, sisters.

Gaining rhetorical power from a charged gender metaphor for the collective, Jacob paints a picture of rivalry, extolling the striving of the daughter of the “peoples.” In contradistinction to her identity as a “mother” in the Gospel story, in line 105 of Jacob’s poem the Canaanite Woman also occupies the subordinate status of “daughter,” – her heroic faith defies the limitations her ethnicity would imply. Through positing the rivalry between these “daughters”, Jacob provides a mechanism for breaking stereotypes found in the Old Testament texts. As we shall see, the logic of both Narsai’s and Jacob’s treatments depends on this reversal of historical trajectories. Both center the logic of the Matthean pericope on the radical conversion of the “peoples,” but for Jacob the intransigence of the “People” is an ever-present corollary.

Adding a further layer to this depiction is Jacob attentiveness to the woman’s location on the land. These mutually exclusive reactions to Jesus’s healings are geographically specific. As the personification of the “People,” Jerusalem not only rejects

84 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” I.426.31-38; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 10.
healing, but according to Jacob misconstrues the lineage of Christ, considering him as only the “son of Joseph.” Mary’s guardian recalls the circumstances of Jesus’s birth, and the reference is suggestive of those who focus on the humanity of Jesus at the expense of proper consideration of his divine nature. In contradistinction to the holy city, the “land of the pagans,” identified with Tyre and Sidon, offers fertile ground for the propagation of the faith.

The daughter of the pagans (Arameans) sung out among the multitudes that he was the Son of David; With her story she rebuked the Judeans for despising him so much. A new message was expressed in the Canaanite Woman; and the prophecy was despised by the Daughter of the people. The knowers of the Scripture scorned the revelations of prophecy The worshipers of images became the first ones in the proclamation of the Gospel. The godless/Gentile woman knew that he was the Son of David and drove out devils, The synagogue which had been trusted rejected him when he healed her. The pagan (Aramean) woman called among the multitudes with a loud voice.85

Through alternating his vocabulary, Jacob underscores the reversal of expectations exemplified in the Canaanite woman’s story. Within these verses we find the label

85 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” L.430.111-119; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 18 (trans. altered).
Aramean (ܐܪܡܝܐ), a term whose usage changed over the course of late antiquity. This points to the flexibility and historically contingent nature of such labels. In his study of Greek-writing Syrians, Nathan Andrade shows the fluid and shifting usage of the terms “Assyrian,” “Syrian,” and “Aramean” to describe the peoples of the region. Over the course of time, “Aramean” comes to signify “pagans” or non-Christians as Syriac-speaking Christians come to self-identify with the Greek label, Syrian. The term Canaanite itself may have been equally flexible in various settings.

In the last lines of this section, Jacob enigmatically describes Canaanite religion as the idolatrous worship of the “gods of nothingness.” Invoking the theme of religious competition, Jacob will return again later to the Canaanite Woman’s rejection of these gods in light of her realization that they are impotent to aid her child. False religion and demonic activity are terrestrial features of human existence. While Narsai foregrounded Satan’s malevolent corruption of the earthly realm, Jacob waits until after introducing the narrative of the Canaanite Woman to remind the audience that the Incarnation was

88 Messo, “The Origin of the Terms ‘Syria(n)’ & Sūryoyo Once Again,” 128-129.
89 In North Africa, for example, the term is also found in the writings of Augustine. Although scholars have debated the manuscript tradition underlying this tradition, Augustine was reported to have claimed that the “rustics” of his diocese referred to themselves as “Canaanites,” supporting a view of a shared cultural heritage between Phoenicians in North Africa and the Levant. Augustine, Epistulae ad Romanos inchoate exposito 13.5, “Whence our rustics, when they are asked what they are, respond in the Phoenician, ‘Chanani,’ with one letter corrupted as is usual, what else are they responding (with) than, ‘Chananei’?” (Unde interrogati rustici nostril, quid sint, Punice respondents: Chanani, corrupta scilicet, sicut in talibus solet, una littera, quid alius respondent quam: Chananei?) For a full discussion of Augustine’s understanding of “Canaanite” in relation to his fellow North Africans and the manuscript issues with these homilies, see Josephine Crawley Quinn, Neil McLynn, Robert M. Kerr and Daniel Hadas, “Augustine’s Canaanites,” Papers of the British School at Rome 82 (2014): 175-197.
necessitated by the “madness” of false religion introduced through “the evil demon [who] buffeted the land with every error.” 90 While Satan may have sowed the seeds of idolatry and false worship indiscriminately across the earth, the geographical boundaries between “Judah” and “the land of the pagans” (ܐܬܘܒܗܕܡܟܠܗܒܚܘܠܡܢܗܐܦܠܗܒܡܝܐܘܠܗܐܚܢܦ܇ܘܐܫܢܝܫܛܢܐܫܒܗܠܐܪܥܐܕܝܘܐܒܝܫܐܒܟܠܗܛܘܥܝܝ) 91 provide structure to the narrative. Over the course of his re-narration Jacob subverts the connotations of ethnic markers through a gradual disruption of our assumptions about the indigenous quality of cultic practice and belief.

One of the key tensions within these poems is the relationship between the universal sinful condition and the specific social location and story of the Canaanite woman. The suffering of the daughter and the mother’s desperate attempts to procure treatment rehearse in miniature a universally experienced human condition. Shifting between a maximalist perspective on humanity’s suffering to the individual plight of the Canaanite Woman, Jacob momentarily sidelines the particularity of Canaanite identity to attach a larger significance to the daughter’s illness:

The entire earth is symbolically depicted in her, and [the earth] resembled her in their sickness and in their healing.

90 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” I.427.63; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 14.

91 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” I.428.75; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 14.
Satan also captured the earth and led it into madness and paganism, and according to his will he carried her off, tortured her, and increased her pains.  

For Jacob, pernicious religious practice manifests itself in physical illness and decay. At this point in Jacob’s narration, he pulls back our gaze to broaden our view. At this remove social categories appear less distinct, becoming almost imperceptible. Thus, the Canaanites may be marked within the narrative as idolaters, but these verses imply that this flaw is not unique to them or a distinctive feature of their identity. Jacob destabilizes the ethnic marker by obscuring the specific content and features of the Canaanites, leaving the term little more than a geographical detail of origin.

Narsai includes a strikingly similar account of Satan’s devastation within the introductory portion of the poem:

Under the pretext of love [Satan] drove them away from the truth, and with enticements he led them astray with the fallacy of his words. They became mad and raged – the demons through people and the people through demons- and the world, sea, and dry land passed by in the likeness of a drunkard.


In contrast to Jacob’s focus on the woman’s daughter, Narsai reminds his listener that spiritual illness – made manifest in psychological ailments and the symptoms of intoxication – are inescapable for humans. The possessed Canaanite girl remains a symbol for both, but Jacob brings the language of symbolic depiction to the surface of his writing.

3.2.3 Comparison

Within the poetic corpora of both Narsai and Jacob, the Canaanite woman emerges as an exemplar for steadfast faith and persistence. The methods for explicating the significance of the woman’s “Canaanite” identity vary in relationship to the overarching rhetorical aims of the two authors. Both poets invoke the dichotomy of Jew and non-Jew, which is largely articulated as the difference between the people and the peoples, to extol this woman for displaying extraordinary faith despite her dubious ethnic identity. As ethically minded exegetes, both Narsai and Jacob universalize the moral and spiritual message of the text by extending the specific connotations of the “Canaanite” to all fallen humanity. The polemical force of their reading sharpens through the destabilization of the ethnic marker of Canaanite to allow for conversion and to censure the failure of ‘the People’ to respond properly.

While Narsai presents the reader with an elaborately drawn lineage for contextualizing the Canaanite Woman’s identity, Jacob marshals with greater consistency the binary opposition between the Jews and the Gentiles. Jacob layers biblical monikers and references to the Jews and Gentiles, further personifying this competitive relationship in the gendered depiction of the “daughter of the Canaanites” and the “daughter of the
People.” The mēmrē of Narsai and Jacob provide a perfect test case for exploring how the ethnic differences and competing lineages form pathways for interpretation. Alongside the objectionable religious practices of the Canaanites, their status as a people enslaved to Satan and his forces becomes a critical feature of Narsai’s reading. Through this lens the illness of the Canaanite Woman’s daughter because a somatic symptom of her spiritual enslavement, a trope resonant with Jacob’s depiction. But Narsai places greater stress on the identity of her current slave master, Satan. By invoking the imagery of bondage, Narsai advances interpretative traditions found in the poetry of Ephrem. Different strategies of re-narration draw from these biblical texts views of difference and universality that are distinct from Pauline discourses while still actively engaged in depicting the Church as bearing a genealogical relationship to both the Gentile “peoples” and the “true” Israel.94

3.3 Case Study: The Woman of Samaria

Among the many ways scholars have sought to define ethnos, origin stories have often been central to their definitions. John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith take up this Weberian trajectory of scholarship defining an ethnic group as: “A named human population with myths of common ancestry, shared historical memories, one or more elements of common culture, a link with a homeland, and a sense of solidarity among at

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94 James D.G. Dunn, “The Question of Anti-semitism in the New Testament,” in Jews and Christians: The Parting of the Ways A.D. 70 TO 135 Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium on Earliest Christianity and Judaism (Grandrapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 207. As the only Evangelist to use the word ἐκκλησία, Matthew according to Dunn’s reading envisions its community as the eschatological people of God (cf. Mt 19:28). The concept of “the congregation of Israel” (קהל ישראל) underlies this usage.
least some of its members.” This sparse description, drawing together the importance of a shared history and acknowledged ancestry, offers a basic blueprint for tracking the various accounts of Samaritan identity we encounter. Sources, often originating in non-Samaritan Jewish circles, as well as early Christian witnesses, provide a varied portrait of the Samaritans, characterizing them as schismatics, heretics, and everything in between. Drawing together both emic and etic accounts, the field of Samaritology has created an increasingly vivid historical, religious, and cultural profile of Samaritans over the last few decades.

While Samaritology adds to our understanding of the diverse religious and ethnic landscape in the eastern Roman Empire, our immediate concerns are focused on Christian perceptions and deployments of the Samaritans. Looking through a historical lens, law codes supply an idealized account of prescriptive attitudes towards Samaritans. The Theodosian code contains legislation aimed at Samaritans within a section pertaining to Jews and Caelicolae as well. In his study of Samaritans under the reign of Justinian,

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97 According to Becking Judaism and Samaritanism were distinct religiously defined groups. But “When and how this separation took place, however, is unclear. Earlier texts reflect antagonisms between North and South, between Samaria/Gerizim and Jerusalem. We should, however, not over-interpret the evidence. At best some hints to proto-Samaritanism can be found.”

98 For the corpus of early Christians references to Samaritans see Reinhard Pummer, Early Christian Authors on Samaritans and Samaritanism. Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism 92 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2002).

Alfredo Mordechai Rabello notes that the second edition of Justinian’s Code (534 CE) moves Samaritan legislation from its previous position within the Theodosian Code to a later chapter concerning heretics (*De Hereticis, et Manichaeis et Samaritis*). Reading Justinian’s draconian legislation, especially laws all but outlawing inheritance within Samaritan families, Rabello understands the increasing severity of Justinian’s policies as contributing and responding to Samaritan rebellions in 529-530. The inclusion of Samaritans among the heretics resonates with their presence in heresiological literature.

Drawing an elaborate genealogy, Ephiphanius attributes to the Samaritans the dubious honor of being first among the sects based on erroneous interpretation of Scripture in his *Panarion*. Ephiphanius explains their beliefs as stemming from their sole reliance on the revelation of the Pentateuch, and he further outlines their denial of the resurrection, unwitting idolatry, and excessive purification rituals. When describing their assiduous attention to purity, Ephiphanius tellingly differentiates them from the “Gentiles,” creating a third category apart from “Gentile” and “Jew.” Origen in *Contra Celsum* likewise differentiates Samaritans as a divisive sect and contributor to the splintering of heterodoxy.

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Shifting from legal and heresiological discourses to exegetical treatments of texts containing references to Samaritans diversifies our picture of early Christian views on Samaritans. According to Jörg Frey, modern scholars need to ask whether New Testament references to Samaritans indicate a widespread mission among these communities or whether they are simply a “cipher” for all Gentiles and pagans. To what extent did Samaritan conflict with Jerusalem-oriented Jews matter for members of the emerging Jesus movement?\(^\text{106}\)

Just as the New Testament authors supplied details about the geographical location and direction of Jesus’s itinerant ministry, early Christian accounts of the Samaritans often preserve the geographical specificity that was vital to Samaritan worship and community. Archaeological excavations, while not yielding definitive evidence about Samaritan origins, indicate a sanctuary on Mt. Gerizim from the Persian period onwards that offered an alternative to Jerusalem for worship.\(^\text{107}\) Reassessing both material evidence and the anti-Samaritan polemic of *Chronicles*, Gary N. Knoppers reminds us that interpretative issues split Samaritans from Judeans who worshipped in Jerusalem, for Mt. Gerizim was specifically cited as a central place for blessing in


\(^{107}\) Becking, “Samaritan Identity,” 64. A key question for Samaritan studies is whether Samaritans worshiped on this mountain in pre-exilic times.
Deuteronomy 11:29; as Knoppers observes, the attacks on Samaritans within the “age of multiple Yahwisms” reveal an ongoing context of religious competition.\(^{108}\)

### 3.3.1 The Samaritan Woman in Jacob of Serugh

The story of the Samaritan Woman raises several thorny theological and interpretative questions, and a pressing concern for our interpreters to answer is why Jesus, without his disciples, approaches the well and asks the woman for water. For many early Christian writers these narrative features point to the unfolding of a divine plan. Chrysostom reads the interaction with the Samaritan Woman as an example of Jesus’s pedagogical strategy, coaxing the woman to ascend from material concerns for water and cultic practice to seek divine wisdom. Extending such reasoning, Jacob places equal stress on Jesus’s condescension. In his thirst and request for water, Jesus ventures into the world of quotidian affairs to seek out this woman: “By the pretext of that common water which He requested from her, He instructed her that He had another water to give.” The Woman’s responses to Jesus, specifically her confession of John 4:25, “‘I know that the Messiah is coming (who is called Christ). When he comes, he will proclaim all things to us,’” reveal her love and receptivity. Our Syriac author theorizes the divine encounter through a language of love and mutual desire.

Anticipating the subject of this woman’s complicated marital status, the marital bond is introduced within the opening lines of Jacob’s composition. Pressing beyond the

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bounds of the biblical story, Jesus’s actions are re-interpreted as approximating a marital bond: “that Woman of many husbands You betrothed so that she might become Yours; betroth to Yourself the soul, that it should never know anyone but You.” Compressed within these two lines Jacob acknowledges the case of the Samaritan Woman while positing the spiritual ideal for the faithful soul to pursue. In his mēmrā on the Samaritan woman, Jacob approaches the New Testament narrative with similar interpretative aims as we saw in his treatment of the Canaanite woman. Jacob underscores the opportunity afforded to the Samaritans through Jesus’s approach early within his introduction: “you offered your road to the Samaritans to walk upon.” Within Syriac poetry the image of “the way” or “road” (ܐܘܪܚܐ) implies conversion and commitment to Christian life. For Jacob this theme of collective conversion on the part of the Samaritans runs throughout the work, rendering the woman an instrument and figure of Jesus’s mission as she is in John’s account (4:28-30, 41-42).

While Jacob calls the listener’s attention to the circumstances of Jesus’s visit and mission to the Samaritan people, his overarching concern is polemical. While some of the commentators noted above indicate a view of Samaritans as outside the category of the “Gentiles” and bearing a unique relationship to Jews, Jacob assimilates them neatly

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109 Jacob of Serugh, *Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,”* II.282.21; idem, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met,* 60. The Syriac text may be found with in Paul Bedjan and Sebastian P. Brock, eds., *Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug* (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006; first published 1902), II.281-312. Although I have made occasional alterations, I also cite the published translation in Jacob of Sarug, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met,* 58-123.
110 See Jacob of Serugh, *Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,”* II.283.60-65; idem, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met,* 64. Jacob will note later on that the road itself compelled Jesus to venture into the Samaritan territory.
alongside the “peoples” who will become the church. The anti-Jewish polemic, bolstered by his binary of the “people and the peoples,” appears early within the poem:

Let Zion be put to shame by this woman from the peoples, for how she investigated the explanation of true things. By the Samaritan woman it was said, “Behold, He is coming,” And jealousy blinded the Hebrews, and they rejected his way.  

Employing a variety of terms is part of Jacob’s poetic artistry as he shifts his vocabulary for the “people” between various biblical terms for Israel. Invoking the Samaritans explicitly with the notion of shame shows how Jacob continually weds ethnic identification to his anti-Jewish polemic. Rhetorically, as Jacob’s invocations of Samaritan multiply, his invective against the Jewish people intensifies.

Among the exegetical questions the poetic narrator raises, the source of the woman’s knowledge is a common thread.

“I know that the messiah is coming,” she said to our Lord,

111 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.297.339-342; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 92 (trans. alt.).

112 Jn 4:25.
But woman, who pointed out for you the news about his way? Who revealed to you the way of the King so that it hastened to come, And who showed you that the Messiah is coming, so you would be expecting him? Who announced to you the revelation of the Bridegroom and the King, For his path was hidden and unknown except in a symbol/mystery? Tell me, Woman, who told you that the Messiah is coming, And who showed you that he would teach you everything? 113

Jacob as poetic narrator addresses the woman (and obliquely his listener) with a series of questions about the source of the woman’s knowledge and emergent belief. Echoing his own poem on the Canaanite woman as well as Narsai’s composition about the Canaanite woman, Jacob underscores the woman’s unexpected spiritual acuteness. In Jacob’s mēmrā, the Samaritan woman emerges as an astute interpreter of the scriptures:

The enviable woman said, “The scriptures announced to me about his revelation, and by his heralds his coming was made known to me. The great Moses depicted his image in prophecy, and He clearly taught us that the Messiah is coming.” 114

The Samaritan woman models spiritual receptivity, displaying an acute sensitivity to the knowledge she lacks and an eager anticipation for what is prophesized. Echoing the depiction of the Canaanite woman in both Narsai and Jacob as “hard-pressed,” the Samaritan woman describes the revelation of Jesus as one of relief from “stumbling blocks”:

113 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.297.343-350; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 92.
114 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.297-298.351-354; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 94.
He will teach us the way of truth that is hidden from us, because his word is light and he will resolve the case of the judgment of the Peoples. He will carry us from the stumbling blocks115 of which we are wearied, and will show us the great path of the house of God.116

Echoing his description of the Canaanite woman as a “Daughter of the peoples,” Jacob casts the Samaritan woman in the same role as she leads her people to spiritual enlightenment: “Day met the Daughter of the Peoples who was dark, and she was enlightened by it and turned to give light to the one who met her.”117

3.3.2 The Forerunner of her people: Romanos’s kontakion on Samaritan Woman

Living in the imperial capital of Constantinople, Romanos composed his poetry in a milieu distinct from the Syriac-speaking cities of Edessa in the eastern Roman empire and Nisibis within the Persian empire. Within his larger corpus the primary locus of ethnic labels appears in his kontakion for Pentecost as the once scattered peoples and languages are brought together through evangelization.118 Linking the episode of the

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115 Cf. Rom 14:13-23; 1 Cor 8:9; Ps 119:165; Ezek 14:7.
116 Jacob of Serugh Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.298.365-368; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 94.
117 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.300.401-402; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 98:

Tower of Babel (Gen 11:1-9) with the events of Acts 2, Romanos traces the arc of salvation history proceeding from fragmentation to unity. Multilingualism becomes an epiphenomenal condition of human existence, laden with symbolic value as a reminder of social disintegration due to sin. The momentum of the redemptive process begun in the Incarnation effects the healing of such divisions.

Like Jacob, Romanos returns repeatedly to the relationship of the Samaritan Woman to her fellow Samaritans. Her community does not have an active role in the story, but their frequent invocation keeps them in the listeners’ thoughts. As a solitary representative of her people, the Samaritan Woman represents her village in her dealings with Christ, approximating the role of a trader or merchant. For Romanos, the woman’s act of hospitality toward a thirsting Christ disguises the larger beneficence her actions bestow upon her people. Latching on to the theme of exchange, Romanos explains the significance of John’s text through tracing the economics of gift in a market ultimately structured by divine grace. Just as the Canaanite woman embodies the virtue of faith, so the Samaritan woman also models a remarkable receptivity. In his prooimion, Romanos introduces the exemplary response of the Samaritan Woman to Christ’s request for refreshment:

“Give me the water of faith,
and I shall receive the streams of that font,
jubilance and deliverance!”

Παράχου μοι τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς πίστεως,
καὶ λήψομαι τῆς κολυμβήθρας τὰ νάματα,
[ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν ]¹¹⁹

Water, as well as its associated imagery of springs and drinking, runs throughout the kontakion as a visual metaphor that parallels the pervasive language of monetary exchange. At the very beginning of the piece, Romanos foregrounds the soteriological significance of the woman’s receptivity to set the stage for her future actions.

The authorial presence within the first strophe furthers the economic import of the passage by exhorting the soul itself not to “hide the talent which was given you,” recalling the Parable of the Talents (Mt 25:14-30 and Lk 19:12-27). Layering these Gospel texts allows Romanos to extract more artfully the moral message of generous gift and zealous acquiring of spiritual goods.¹²⁰ The soul, thus called upon to be a merchant, must be diligent and discerning as it accrues spiritual treasure. The ordering of Romanos’s re-telling, along with the dizzying pace of the poetry, confuses the lines of transmission and blurs the literal provision of water with the spiritual bestowal of salvific grace. By the end of strophe 2, Romanos employs a playful example of paradox: “She thirsts but spills over; not having drunk, she offers drink.”¹²¹ As Carpenter notes, the assonance of the line delightfully underscores the message: διψᾷ καὶ δαψιλεύεται, μὴ πιοῦσα ποτίζει.¹²² But with whom does she share her windfall? Before tasting, Romanos says, she cries out as one inebriated “to those of her race” (τοῖς ὀμοφύλοις). This adjective is an amalgam of the nominal term τὸ

¹¹⁹ Romanos, Hymn IX.Pro (XIX.Pro).
¹²⁰ Romanos, Hymn IX.1 (XIX.1).
¹²¹ Romanos, Hymn IX.2 (XIX.2): διψᾷ καὶ δαψιλεύεται, μὴ πιοῦσα ποτίζει.
φῦλον, which connotes the categories of race, tribe, and class of men, while also being employed for hosts or swarms of animals. The first words spoken by the woman, beyond the Gospel text, are addressed to her fellow Samaritans:

ἀκμὴν μὴ γευσαμένη, ἀλλ᾽ ως μεμεθυσμένη τοῖς ὀμοφύλοις κράζει· Δεῦτε ὥρα τάμα ὡς εὑρον· μὴ ὁτος πέλει <άρα>
ὁ παρέχων
[: ἀγαλλίασιν και ἀπολύτρωσιν :]

she has not yet tasted, but as a drunk she shouts to her compatriots: “Come and see the stream which I have discovered. Is he not the one who offers jubilance and deliverance?”

The Woman’s words recall the final line of the proiomion, giving voice to the thematic thread, “joy and redemption.” This refrain no longer exists in the abstract realm of the poet’s exposition of the narrative themes, but through the liturgy it enters into the concrete instantiation of the narrative setting through performance. This woman and her people anticipate the relationship of poet and congregation, rehearsing the stanza and the refrain in the drama that unfolds.

Having oriented the listener to the overarching themes of the kontakion, Romanos returns to the Gospel text of John. Foregrounding the poet’s persona, Romanos invites his audience to examine the “springs” and the text of scripture: “so let us examine carefully all the springs and recall for a moment the passages from the Gospel.”

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123 LSJ s.v. ὀμοφύλος.
124 Romanos, Hymn IX.2 (XIX.2).
125 Romanos, Hymn IX.3 (XIX.3).
prompts his listener to examine the spiritual levels of the narrative: the well water the woman offers and the spiritual enlightenment Christ holds. Yet Romanos also preempts a question that may not have occurred to the reader: at what point did the Samaritan Woman enjoy that water Christ offered? Within these lines Romanos tempers our expectations for the Samaritan Woman’s enlightenment; instead we are instructed to ask: what did she lack? What impeded her from attaining her goal?

As Romanos transitions from thematic exposition to unfolding the dramatic encounter, he explicates the timing and apparent reason for Jesus’ approach. In a warm season, at the sixth hour, Jesus came to “illumine those in darkness.” As we have seen with the Canaanite Woman, the benighted state of the Peoples is a familiar trope for depicting Christ’s interactions with those outside Israel. Here the illumination of the spiritually ignorant joins the language of purification.

Τότε γυνὴ Σαμαρείτις ἐπὶ ὤμων τὴν ὑδρίαν ἠρε καὶ ἤλθεν ἐξελθοῦσα τὴν Συχάρ, πόλιν ἰδιαν· καὶ τίς οὐ μακαρίζει τὴν ἔξοδον ἐκείνης καὶ τὴν εἴσοδον; ἐξῆλθε γὰρ ἐν ῥύπῳ, εἰσῆλθε δὲ ἐν τύπῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἀμωμος· ἐξῆλθε καὶ ἐξήντλησε τὴν ζωὴν ὡσπερ σπόγγον· ἐξῆλθεν ὑδροφόρος, εἰσῆλθε θεοφόρος· καὶ τίς οὐ μακαρίζει τοῦτο τὸ θῆλυ, μᾶλλον δὲ σέβει τὴν ἐξ ἐθνῶν, τὸν τύπον, τὴν λαβοῦσαν |: ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν :|

Then the woman of Samaria, who had gone out from her village of Sychar, came carrying a water vessel on her shoulders. Who would not call blessed the going out and the coming in of that woman?\footnote{Resonance with the Magnificat. The poet plays with the words for “departure/go out” and “arrival/coming in” in this strophe, probably alluding to Ps 120 (121).8: “The Lord will keep your going out (ἔξοδόν) and your coming in (εἴσοδόν)” and Deut 28.6: “Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.”}
For she went out in filth, but she came back unblemished in the figure of the church; she went out and absorbed life like a sponge; she went out a water-bearer; she came back a God-bearer. Who does not bless this woman and even revere her - the woman from the nations, the figure, who receives *jubilance and deliverance.*

This strophe features the familiar reading of the woman as a figure for the Church; Romanos signals this reading unambiguously here by branding her a “type” (τύπος). An interlinear rhyme however links typological relationship (ἐν τύπῳ) to an unspecified condition of uncleanness – she leaves her village of Sichar in filth or dirt (ἐν ῥύπῳ). The sonorous quality of the Greek links the two principal aspects of her condition Romanos raises for our consideration: her initial filth and her endurance as a type for the church.

In the next strophe Romanos switches from orienting the listener to the dramatic action and circumstances to rehearsing the exchange between Jesus and the woman. Romanos intensifies the Marian parallels through likening her speech to Mary’s exchange with the Angel Gabriel, the subject of Romanos’s *kontakion* “On the Annunciation.” Her reply to Jesus’s request for water, its tone as well as its phrasing, requires careful parsing:

…… οὐκ ἔτραχνίθη, ἀλλ’ εἶπε εἰλημμένος: “Καὶ πῶς σὺ <ὁ> Ἰουδαίος ὅν ἠτήσω με;” ὑπέμνησε τὸ δόγμα, μετέπειτα τὸ πόμα φρονίμως ἐπηγεῖλατο· οὐκ εἶπε γάρ: “Οὐ δίδωμι ἀλλοφύλῳ σοι πίνειν”, ἀλλ’ εἶπε: “Πῶς ἠτήσω; ὡς ποτὲ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἡ θεοτόκος ἔφη: “Πῶς ἐσται τούτο, πῶς ὁ ἀμήτωρ μητέρα με λαμβάνει ὁ παρέχων [: ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν;”:]

……..She was not vexed, but said thoughtfully, “And how can you, a Jew, ask me this?”

128 Romanos, Hymn IX.5 (XIX.5).
129 Jn 4:7.
130 Jn 4:9.
She called to mind the precept, but then prudently provided the drink; she did not say, “I am not giving you, a foreigner, a drink,” but she said, “How can you ask this?” Just as the God-bearer said to the angel: “How can this be? How can the motherless one take me as a mother, He who offers

*jubilance and deliverance?*”

The Samaritan Woman’s retort belies the hospitality and generosity Romanos presents as laudable in the opening strophes. Bewilderment at Jesus’s apparent affront to social mores – perhaps even frustration – color her reply. Amplifying the unfolding “social drama” as related in the biblical text, Romanos explores the negotiation of boundaries as a process of mutual recognition within the existing social structures.

As Romanos builds on the tradition of reading the Samaritan woman as a figure for her people, he is explicit about standing as a “type.” The parallels with Mary underscore the receptive nature of her faith and virtue, but the manuscript offers an interesting alternative reading. The Oxford editors, Paul Maas and C.A. Trypanis emend the following verse so that it now offers a reference to Mary:

Ἰδοὺ μοι δύο εἰκόνων ἡ Σαμαρείτις ἐκ τῆς Συχὰρ ἀνεφάνη, ἐκκλησίας καὶ Μαρίας· διὰ τοῦτο μὴ παρέλθωμεν αὐτήν· ἔχει γὰρ τέρψιν.

Look, the Samaritan woman from Sychar appeared to me

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131 I.e. the Theotokos.
132 Romanos, Hymn IX.6 (XIX.6).
133 Victor Turner, “Social Dramas and the Stories about Them,” in *On Narrative* edited by W.J.T. Mitchell p. 137-164 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980). 137-164. While John’s Gospel recounts a “quotidian” social interaction involving the negotiation of communal and gender boundaries, the re-enactment of this narrative within the setting of religious ritual and worship invites a more fluid relationship between the account and the setting of its re-telling. As Turner notes, “In preliminal rites of separation the initiand is moved from the indicative quotidian social structure into the subjunctive antistructure of the liminal process and is then returned, transformed by liminal experiences, by the rites of reaggregation to social structural participation in the indicative mood” (159). Romanos dramatizes the transformative encounter of the women and Christ throughout his verses.
as a painter of two images: of the church and of Mary, so let us not pass her by, for she has delight to offer.\textsuperscript{134}

Within the larger context of the last few stanzas, the invocation of Mary is arguable. However, the lone manuscript for this text, the Patmos manuscript offers a different reading of this line that the French editor, Grosdidier de Matons follows ἐκκλησίας καὶ σαμαρίας:

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figure3.jpg}
\caption{Figure 3 Patmos Mss. f. 136v}
\end{figure}

The manuscript evidence supports a reading that underscores the significance of her identity as a Samaritan. What might it mean to follow the scribe and render the woman a type of “Samaria”? It would emphasize the identity of the Church as – in the words of the Syriac authors we have encountered – one “from the Nations,” including Samaria.

3.4 Conclusion

Syriac and Greek verse re-narrations encompass a variegated reception of the Canaanite and Samaritan women. While all three authors examined here invoke biblical traditions around Samaritan and Canaanite communities, our Syriac authors demonstrate an acute interest in the geographic and kinship details that account for the ethnic specificity of these New Testament figures.\textsuperscript{135} The Canaanite and Samaritan figures serve

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{134} Romanos, Hymn IX.7 (XIX.7).
\end{flushleft}
as test cases for observing how poets exercise ethnic-reasoning so often observed in Christian heresiological and apologetic literature. Narsai and Jacob, writing in the multilingual and demographically complex region of Upper Mesopotamia, attribute greater agency and spiritual receptivity to the Samaritan and Canaanite women, heightening the dramatic tension within their re-narrations by emphasizing the impediments these women surmount in their encounter with Jesus. While sharing with Narsai and Jacob the impulse to craft religious exampla from marginalized figures, Romanos’s reliance on bodily metaphors of impurity dominate his presentation of the Samaritan woman, and he emphasizes her transformation into a “type” for the church through baptismal imagery. Thus, the interpretative strategies poets employ to contextualize the ethnic markers of biblical characters conditions the exemplarity of female characters. Read against the historical background of their authors, these poetic portraits contribute to our overall understanding of how late antique Christians grafted themselves into biblical history and balanced claims of Christian universalism with enduring ethnic difference.
4. Emboldened Words: Speech in Syriac and Greek Poetry

“O, how wonderful is the human voice! It is indeed the organ of the soul! The intellect of man sits enthroned visibly upon his forehead and in his eye; and the heart of man is written upon his countenance. But the soul reveals itself in the voice only; as God revealed himself to the prophet of old in the still, small voice; and in a voice from the burning bush. *The soul of man is audible, not visible.* A sound alone betrays the flowing of the eternal fountain, invisible to man!”

“Feminism: a history of willful tongues. Feminism: that which infects a body with a desire to speak in ways other than how you have been commanded to speak.”

4.1 Introduction

Through the performance of poetry in Late Antiquity, the schools and liturgical spaces of the eastern Mediterranean resounded with human voices. The materiality of those voices reflected the cadences of diverse tongues and the unique timbre of individual vocalists. The ephemerality of human speech compels us to imagine the sonorous qualities of this poetry and the identities of the singers by piecing together evidence for

1 Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hyperion* 3.3 “Interlachen.”
poetic performances. Experiencing these poems as readers rather than listeners, we discern the compositional polyphony from the written word. The poetry of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos teems with representations of speech as well as the imagery of elocution, revealing the complex integration of orality and aurality in Late Antiquity.

Across diverse genres of Greek and Syriac poetry – the madrāshē, kontakia, mēmrē, and dialogue poems (soghyāthā) – the voices of biblical characters figure prominently. The prevalence of female voices within this poetry stands in contrast to the silence and passivity expected of women. Over previous chapters we have explored the

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5 Erik Gunderson, *Staging Masculinity: The Rhetoric of Performance in the Roman World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000). One of the ongoing questions is how the shifts between the voices of the narrator and various characters were marked. Later manuscripts of Romanos’s poetry show editors identifying the characters which provides some clues. For a longer discussion of this, see Thomas Arentzen, *The Virgin in Song: Mary and the Poetry of Romanos the Melodist*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 28-29. While ultimately some of these questions are unanswerable, we must continue to leave conceptual room for how the embodied voice enhanced the performance of these works. As Gunderson observes: “The motions of the body and the modulations of the voice serve as their own sort of language, a *sermo corporalis*. Accordingly, the body itself is opened up to the full critical vocabulary of the rhetorical tradition” (67).

6 Walter J. Ong, “The Shifting Sensorium,” in *The Varieties of Sensory Experience: A Sourcebook in the Anthropology of the Senses*, ed. David Howes (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 28: “The relationship of sound and of the word itself to the human lifeworld varies too. Sound and the word itself must thus be considered in terms of the shifting relationships between the senses. These relationships must not be taken merely abstractly but in connection with variations in cultures. In this connection, it is useful to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium.” I use the terms “orality” and “aurality” here in the limited sense of their “style or the mode of expression,” rather than their “phonic realization.” For a fuller discussion see Wulf Oesterreicher, “Types of Orality in Text,” in *Written Voices, Spoken Signs: Tradition, Performance, and the Epic Text*, eds. Egbert Bakker and Ahuvia Kahane (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 190-214.

7 Froma I. Zeitlin observes this same paradox in Greek theater in *Playing the Other: Gender and Society in Classical Greek Literature* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), 345-345; Laura McClure, *Spoken Like a Woman: Speech and Gender in Athenian Drama* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 170)
various ways Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos underscore the marginality and extraordinary faith of biblical women through attention to the gendered body and ethno-religious identities. Throughout these case studies the attribution of imagined speech has appeared frequently as an essential strategy for deepening characterization and adding psychological depth.\(^8\) Within the ritual or school room setting, these poems contributed to the “cultivation” of the believer as an “ethical subject.”\(^9\) The attribution of speech to female characters was a critical means of advancing this pedagogical and pastoral goal. In this chapter I attend explicitly to how Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos depicted bold and potentially transgressive female speech in dialogue with Jesus. Our poets script human encounters with the divine through carefully constructing and cautiously celebrating the speech of female characters, providing a model for the confident proclamation of belief by all.

Rather than isolating the speech of biblical women, we must “hear” their scripted voices within a broader textual *soundscape* of poetry, a reading inclusive of both divine


and human utterances. Within these narrative worlds biblical women emerge as vivid presences whose words and actions advance the religious and moral messages of this poetry. Women do not speak in isolation within early Christian poetry, but in concert with divine and human others. All three poets underscore how biblical women model exemplary zeal, but the unnamed women of the New Testament elude the efforts of male writers to tame and coerce them into a tidy exemplarity. Inhabiting the female voice, Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos relate biblical stories of humanity’s encounter and response to divine initiative, invoking the very ambiguities and tensions of gendered speech.

4.1.1 Dramatic Dialogue and the Specter of Representation

Despite their consistent polemic against the theatre in Late Antiquity, Christian orators and poets employed rhetorical techniques that imbued their writings with drama and emotion. The prominence of dialogue and extended soliloquy within this literature heightens the drama of poetic narrations of familiar stories, rendering this poetry an alternative form of “theatre.” Moving beyond the biblical text, our poets expanded the

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12 The “dramatic” features of the kontakia and the mēmrē are similar, but it is important to remember the distinct nature of these genres. While a strong narrator is prominent within the mēmrē, the more condensed style of the kontakion is driven by dialogue. In his unpublished dissertation and publications, Uffe H.
speech acts attributed to women in the New Testament to explore their motivations and perceptions. In light of their distinct styles and artistic personalities, the centrality of imagined speech to the poetic rhetoric of Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos Melodos stands as one of the strongest commonalities between them. For listeners (and readers) of this poetry, how did these speaking figures reflect, intersect, and subvert the ideologies of the feminine voice present in fifth- and sixth-century Christianity? How do they script the performance of holiness in ways that challenge their audience’s (and our) assumptions about the performance of femininity in the ancient world? Within these poems we do not encounter the voices and perspectives of women, but rather the “woman” through whom or against whom the male author delineates his vision of faithfulness to the Gospel message.


15 David M. Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and other Essays on Greek Love (New York: Routledge, 1990), 129.

16 Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and other Essays on Greek Love, 149: “Diotima has turned out to be not so much a woman as a ‘woman,’ a necessary female absence – occupied by a male signifier – against which Plato defines his new platonic philosophy.”
Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos inhabited female voices in their roles as story-tellers, poets, interpreters, and ecclesial leaders. Through composing fictive speeches, poets engaged in the active exploration of the personalities and traits of biblical figures. Through such passages characters become far more defined and textured than strict paraphrasing of the biblical narrative would allow.  

Rhetorical handbooks from both the classical and late ancient periods elaborated upon this practice of ethopoeia (ἐθοποιία), “an imitation of the character of a person supposed to be speaking.” These practices carried on throughout Late Antiquity as attested in Progymnasmata of Libanius, the teacher of rhetoric in Antioch whose students included Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. The examples from Libanius’s handbook range from the speeches of epic heroes such as Ajax and Achilles to those of the women of Greek tragedy as well as a nameless prostitute. Throughout these examples, the diction and emotionality of the speakers conform to expectations about their particular gender and social location, as exemplified in Niobe’s lament over her fateful boast to Leto. While Greek orators


18 Hermogenes, 9.20 The Greek text may be found in Hugo Rabe, ed., Hermogenis opera (Lipsiae: B.G. Teubneri, 1913), 1-27. For an English translation see George A. Kennedy, Progymnasmata: Greek Textbooks of Prose Composition and Rhetoric (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 84-85. Extant treatments of the rhetorical technique within Hermogenes, Aphthonius, Nicolaus, and Theon show variations; Hermogenes differentiates ethopoeia from prosopopoeia by defining the latter as speech attributed to a non-human being.

19 The Greek text and facing translation may be found in Craig A. Gibson, trans. Libanius’s Progymnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Composition and Rhetoric (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2008), 355-403.

20 Gibson, trans. Libanius’s Progymnasmata: Model Exercises in Greek Composition and Rhetoric, 380: καὶ μακρὰν φιλίαν ῥήμα μικρὸν φθάσαν τὸν λογισμόν διέπασε καὶ διέλυσεν.
refined the practice of *ethopoeia*, the technique was widespread as evidenced in Jewish liturgical poetry (*piyyutim*) as well as Syriac poetry. The diffusion and absorption of such techniques functioned in tandem with the rich indigenous traditions of dialogue and imagined speech within Syriac and Mesopotamian literature more broadly. Romanos’s compositions, for example, deploy dialogue and imagined speech frequently, and this feature may reflect the confluence of cultural influences. During his time training to be a deacon in Berytus, Romanos would have been exposed to Greek rhetoric and theater, but within his native Syriac-speaking environs he also would have encountered the dialogic poetic style of the Syriac-speaking communities.

The creation of fictive speeches accomplished multiple ends. In addition to dramatizing particular stories, poets crafted their own personae as poetic narrators. The narrator’s voice becomes an essential element within these poems, guiding the listener through the narrative and underscoring the essential ethical implications of the biblical story according to the rhythms of the liturgical calendar. Sarah Gador-Whyte has argued that Romanos renders himself a character (and model penitent) through his use of *auto-

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ethopoeia, a means of “self-construction.” This practice may be found within the poetry of Jacob and Narsai as well.

These poets constructed literary representations of women against the background of social and religious expectations of femininity and women’s speech. Within the broader late ancient and Byzantine world, formal and informal social structures enforced the silence of women, revealing an area of continuity between the classical, late ancient, and Byzantine worlds. In the hands of patristic authors, biblical texts such as 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 and 1 Timothy 2:11 provided stable ground for erecting their gender ideologies. Drawing on Roman and later Christian ascetic authors, Kate Wilkinson surveys the varied landscape of expectations for women’s silence and

24 The role of rhetorical performance in the construction of masculinity and the formation of men in antiquity has been the subject of fruitful study. See Maud Gleason, Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995); Kate Wilkinson, Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), esp. 86-116; Wilkinson’s survey includes examples from classical writers as well as Christian ascetic authorities: Plutarch, Moralia 142D; Pelagius Demetria 19.4; Jerome, epistle 130.3.
speech, and she concludes that late ancient women navigated this terrain through measuring the propriety of their voices as well as gesture and bodily comportment: “It is an evident silence, a shining silence.”

The performance of feminine virtue was a complex choreography of body and voice.

With the rise of Christianity, the ideology of feminine speech was infused with renewed religious authority. While silence was frequently invoked as a mark of virtue, women were expected to speak within certain situations. The social location of the speaker and circumstances of the speech act were critical components in adjudicating between virtuous and censurable habits of speech within the ancient Mediterranean region.

In addition to frequently cited sources from Latin ascetic writers such as Jerome and homilists like John Chrysostom, church orders and poetry provide ample evidence for gendered speech. The Didascalia Apostolorum culls Proverbs 31:10-31 for the traits of the ideal wife in the third chapter, and later chapters draw on misogynist stereotypes of widowed women as uncouth gossips.

Gregory of Nazianzus composed as a wedding gift an epistolary poem for Olympias counseling her on virtues proper to a wife. Among the many injunctions Gregory stipulates, he sees female speech as particularly useful in assuaging male anger: “You should yield to your husband when he rages and assist with

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27 Wilkinson, Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity, 102.
soft words and the best consolations when he is distressed. The caretaker of a lion does not soothe the fierceness of the beast with its strength, when it pants and roars in anger, but tames it by cooling it down with his hands and coaxing words.”

Persuasive female speech had the power to preserve the harmony of the household. Through discernment of the proper context and aim, women could use their voice to achieve circumscribed ends.

As poets crafted ethical exempla from the unnamed women of the New Testament, they represented women speaking in ways beyond the bounds of the everyday. Biblical women, like the female martyrs, could transgress the bounds of normative speech. The depictions of biblical women capture the concurrent exercise of agency and will within the marginalized social positions they occupy. The Canaanite woman speaks as an “outsider” and distressed mother; the Hemorrhaging woman gives voice to bodily illness and desperation. As the poets explore the personalities and psychology of these biblical women, they hold them up for the audience as objects of critique and praise as well as subjects in need of spiritual counsel. Literary representations of women became a mirror for the Christian self. This poetry bore pedagogical value for mixed as well as male-only crowds within eastern churches,

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30 Gregory Nazianzen. *Ad Olym.* II.2.6:

Εἴκειν μὲν βρομέοντι, πονειομένῳ δ᾽ ἐκαρήγειν, μύξοις μαλακοῖσι παραφίησι τ’ ἀρίσταις· οὐδὲ λεοντοκόμος θηρὸς μένος εὔνασεν ἀλκῇ, ἀσθμασι βραχάλεοις χαλούμενοι, ἀλλὰ δαμάζει χερεὶς καταφήγουν καὶ αἰμωλίοις λόγοις.

The edited Greek text may be found in Gregorio Nazianzeno, *Ad Olimpiade (carm. II,2,6): Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, commento e appendici*, trans. and ed. Lucia Bacci (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 1996); Forthcoming translation by Christos Simelidis. I am grateful to Dr. Simelidis for bringing this work to my attention.

showing that the feminine other was understood as a vital component to the catechetical training and religious education of all Christians.32

As commentators and interpreters of biblical texts, poets realized the potential for the female voice to serve as a vehicle for religious and moral messages. In contrast, modern feminist discourse invokes the “voice” in both literal and metaphorical levels to represent female agency and subjectivity.33 These literary resources offer circuitous routes to follow in the search for the vox feminae within early Christian sources.34 In order to examine women’s voices within early Christian literature, one must wrestle with the perennial challenge of how to approach representations of women in male-authored texts.

Our constant awareness of the highly crafted and rhetorical nature of these cultural productions conditions our approach and compels us to ask questions about the

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32 Zeitlin, Playing the Other, 346: Zeitlin takes as her starting point that Greek theater (just as later Shakespearean theater) assumed that the “self that is really at stake” is the male. The woman thus becomes the radically other.
34 Scholars of New Testament and Early Christian studies – as well as theologians – have employed various feminist strategies for re-narrating the first centuries of the Christian movement. For a sweeping overview of classic trajectories, ranging from reconstruction of a lost, egalitarian church to rejection of Christianity as inherently patriarchal, see Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer, “Introduction,” in That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity, eds. Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 1-18; When the approaches of post-structuralism and deconstruction guide the reading of the sources, Elizabeth A. Clark has argued, the social function of texts becomes clearer. See “The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the ‘Linguistic Turn,’” Church History 67, no. 1 (1998): 25-31.
construction of gender and deployment of the feminine voice.35 The medievalist Gabrielle Spiegel charts a course for overcoming the apparent caesura between historical realities and literature: “What literature offers is an index of socially construable meaning rather than an image of reality; it is to the construction of social meaning, rather than the transmission of messages about the world, that the exercise of literature is directed.”36

Attending to the broader textual strategies for scripting femininity, one observes that these literary constructions are embedded in larger religious discourses. Drawn by the divine “Word” and news of Jesus’s power, the biblical women under examination here respond and reflect an economy of salvation which depends on the circulation of salvific and faithful speech. While these characters speak as women, they are models for the faithful of both genders. Their gender is a critical, but not totalizing, feature of their characterizations.

Authors scripted female speech for a variety of pedagogical and rhetorical aims. Among female biblical characters, speeches attributed to Mary have been a touchstone for exploring the implications of gender in these literary representations. In her overview of Mary’s voice in Syriac poetry, Susan Ashbrook Harvey underscores the ways Ephrem accentuates the paradoxes of the Incarnation through Mary: “The marginalized stands at

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the center, the voiceless becomes heard, eloquent and clear.\textsuperscript{37} When writing about the characterization of Mary in the \textit{kontakia} of Romanos, Thomas Arentzen distinguishes between these two functions:

There are two aspects of Mary’s voice in the kontakia, the \textit{dramatized} voice and the \textit{thematized} voice. The thematized voice is her voice as it is spoken of; the word “voice” may then often appear in a more metonymical sense, representing her ability to make herself heard, and to speak on someone’s behalf. She is said to be the voice of her people, for example. In an instance of both dramatized and thematized voice, Mary speaks about herself as “the mouth… of my entire race.”\textsuperscript{38}

Such a binary, however, is not unique to Mary. It may be further observed that the theme of speech is broader — especially within Syriac authors — than the woman’s voice alone. Through applying this same dichotomy to the poetry of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos, we will see how the theme of the revelatory voice is wedded to a robust understanding of the divine power of speech within the created order and the Christian life. Depictions of speaking female figures interact playfully and critically with societal norms, but the theme of speech, often presented in gendered and corporeal imagery, encompasses larger theological concerns.

\subsection*{4.2 Dramatized Speech}

The \textit{mēmrē} of Narsai and Jacob on the Canaanite woman are organized quite differently. As a poetic narrator, Narsai highlights the larger salvation economy driven by

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\textsuperscript{38} Arentzen, \textit{The Virgin in Song}, 23.
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the saving Word, rendering the larger cosmological struggle central to properly understanding the specific experience of this woman. Jacob’s mēmrā focuses from the very beginning on the dramatic action of the woman’s approach and her encounter with Jesus, but as a narrator Jacob yokes this biblical narrative to an overarching polemic against biblical and contemporary Jews. This concentration on the New Testament narrative allows him to embellish and expand the speech of the woman specifically to draw out the edifying message of the Gospel story as well as the significance of this woman for understanding the scope of Jesus’s ministry. One can identify three stages or levels within Narsai’s and Jacob’s representations of the Canaanite woman as a speaker: the woman first as a petitioner on her daughter’s behalf, second as one crying out and lamenting without words, and last as a confessor and pre-cursor of the faithful believer.

4.2.1 A Bold Request: The Speech of the Canaanite Woman in Narsai

In the previous chapter we examined how Narsai scripts the woman’s argument with Jesus and her self-disclosure of her lineage. As the poet relates the exchange between Jesus and the woman, he both glosses the biblical text and prompts his listener to respond appropriately to the woman’s word. The woman, according to Narsai, “saw the Lord of the flock who visited his sheep, and she hastened to enter the fold of his sweet words (المَلَكَ بَسِيْلَ، كَمُوسَلَهُ).”39 Within Narsai’s re-telling, the woman blends the metaphorical language of crumbs and dogs with the imagery of healing throughout her speech. Jesus explains to his disciples, and by extension to Narsai’s audience, that the

Canaanites are not simply “dogs” but “voracious dogs who have not been sated with iniquity.” As Narsai embellishes the woman’s rejoinder to Jesus, he extrapolates from the metaphors of animals to clear implications for the imagined hierarchy among humans:

Allow me to live from your aid among the ranks of the dogs, just as you allow the mute creatures to live along with those who speak. Grant me that I be worthy of the small remainder from your gift, for there is nothing among the created things which does not live from the treasure of your love. Grant me that I receive my vital sustenance along with the silent ones, and I will live in grace as all the creatures which your Hint sustains.

The woman creates a parallel between the dogs and the “silent ones,” aligning herself with the humble ones. For one reading against the “grain” of these verses, the question arises: by wishing to be counted among the “dogs,” is the woman willing her own silence? The vocabulary and imagery of these lines recall a particularly obscure description of the woman from earlier in the poem: “An advocate (her) mouth became for (her) emotions before the Judge, and the mute ones on behalf of those endowed with speech gave forth plaintive sounds.” Narsai does not determine the answer to the question, but the extension of the imagery beyond the language of crumbs and dogs

creates an ambiguity. Directly after these statements, Narsai as narrator steps in to direct our attention to the ethical lesson of the woman’s speech:

O wisdom brought forth by a heart lost in error; and (this heart) has learned and now teaches how to converse wisely. O knowledge proceeding from a mind mired in sin, and rather than deceit (this mind) spoke truth before the All-knower. O mind aged upon the earth in the service of iniquity, which has longed to engage with spiritual things not seen by it before. Her modesty and her faith the All-knower regarded with wonder, and He revealed and uncovered before the eyes of the onlookers the truth of her soul.\(^\text{43}\)

With this series of exclamatory verses, Narsai does not curb the woman’s speech but upholds it for the community to admire. We also see within these verses the invocation of traditional female virtues such as modesty (ܟܢܝܟܘܬܐ) invoked as wondrous in light of her exquisite faith. Narsai echoes Proverbs 31:26, a passage transmitted by the *Didascalia Apostolorum*: “She opens her mouth in wisdom, firmly, and the law of mercy is upon her tongue.”\(^\text{44}\) The woman is visible for the virtue of her words and discernment. The woman’s speech is framed as modesty, creating a paradox between Narsai’s frequent


\(^{44}\) Vööbus, ed., *The Didascalia Apostolorum in Syriac Chapters I-X*, 175.22-223; 176.22-23:
praise for the woman’s boldness. Perched between modesty and audacity, the poetic Canaanite woman traverses a tightrope of acceptability. Her virtue according to Narsai lies not simply in her witty and persuasive repartee, but in her ability to strike a delicate balance.

4.2.2 Persistence: The Speech of the Canaanite Woman in Jacob of Serugh

In contrast to the consistently verbal nature of Narsai’s narrations, Jacob characterizes the woman’s confrontation of Jesus as wavering between the articulate and the pre-linguistic, underscoring the woman’s aural presence within his narration. The Matthean text describes the woman’s plea as a simple report of her daughter’s captivity: “my daughter is wickedly oppressed by a demon (ܒܪܬܝ ܒܝܫܐܝܬ ܡܬܕܒܪܐ ܡܢ ܫܐܕܐ). The verb ܕܒܪ in the passive can express the idea of “being oppressed” but also being led or dragged against one’s will. Jacob does not repeat the same wording of the Gospel; rather, he describes her initial action multiple times to capture different aspects. The verses first describing the woman’s address to Jesus depict her as a plaintiff making accusations against those who have perpetrated a grave ill against her and her daughter. After telling his listener that the woman ran after Jesus, Jacob says, “and against Satan she made the accusation that she was oppressed” (ܐܬ ܕܛܠܝܡܐ ܗܘܬ;).

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45 See Chapter Five for the language of boldness and examination of relevant passages.
46 Pablo Alonso, The Woman who Changed Jesus: Crossing Boundaries in Mk 7,24-30 (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 213-214. In his reception history of the Markan text of Syrophoenician woman, Pablo Alonso shows how exegetes have misread this pericope as extolling her faith rather than her intellect. For poets such as Narsai these are not mutually exclusive.
47 This portion of Mt 15:22 in Greek reads: ἡ θυγάτηρ μου κακῶς δαιμονίζεται (“My daughter is wickedly oppressed by a demon”).
here Jacob uses the Syriac verb ܛܠܡ whose passive particle may be translated as “wronged” or “injured” instead of the verb choice of the New Testament translator (δαιμονίζεσται). One notices that Jacob’s wording drops any reference to the woman’s daughter, allowing the reader to infer the suffering one as both the woman and her daughter. A few lines later Jacob repeats, “and she went out to accuse the Plunderer who had snatched her daughter” (ܒܪܬܗܕܚܛܦܒܙܘܙܐܥܠܕܬܩܒܘܠܘܢܦܩܬ). Jacob repeats the root for “accuse” (ܡܣ), underscoring the pointedness of the woman’s words.

Jacob’s unhurried poetic style allows him to gradually unfold the woman’s actions and speech, adding layer upon layer of verbal activity and complexity. She emerges not only as an accuser, but also as one forcefully directing the actions of Jesus: “She taught (or instructed) him to expel the demon of her daughter” (ܘܐܠܦܬܗܗܘܬܕܠܗܘܢܛܪܘܕܕܒܪܬܗܫܐܕܐ). After foreshadowing the nature of the woman’s speech, Jacob employs the wording of the Gospel text to introduce her speech:

48 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.428.80; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 16. The Syriac text may be found with in Paul Bedjan and Sebastian P. Brock, eds., Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006; first published 1902), I.424-444. The translations of this mēmrā are largely my own, but I have consulted the fine translation published in Jacob of Sarug, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, trans. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Sebastian P. Brock, Reyhan Durmaz, Rebecca Stephens Falcasantos, Michael Payne, and Daniel Picus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 8-49. I will provide the page number of the translation as well for further reference.

49 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.428.82; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 16.

50 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.428.86; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 16.
She began *crying out* among the multitude and petitioning him:

“My Lord, son of David, have pity upon me for I have been robbed.

Lo, my daughter was wickedly taken captive by Satan

This request is yours if you are willing.

The hater of mercy seized the maiden and lo, he is harassing her.

Snatch her from him and once recovered she will be yours.

The shameless one led astray the lovely maiden and lo, he has been crushing her.

Rebuke him to go away and let her mind which has been troubled by him be restored.\(^{51}\)

The woman’s breathless speech exemplifies Jacob’s narrative strategy of expansion and elaboration. The words attributed to her in the New Testament become a springboard for detailing the woman’s plight. No longer is the girl possessed by a generic demon, but by Satan himself, echoing the *mēmrā* of Narsai which foregrounds Satan as an active participant in the narrative action. Her verbal expression begins as the non-verbal cry (ܩܥܐ) accounted in the Gospel, but Jacob frames her words as a petition. Giving voice to the suffering of her daughter, this female petitioner resembles the woman afflicted with the flow of blood who addressed her own illness as she focuses our attention on female suffering. The woman fashions herself as a victim as well: she has been robbed of her child (ܕܒܙܝܙܐܐܢܐ), playing with the epithet for Satan used earlier (ܒܙܘܙܐ). Both Narsai and Jacob extend the woman’s address to Jesus by depicting the woman as both a petitioner *and* a bargainer. She argues with Jesus that if only he would act, her daughter

\(^{51}\) Jacob of Serugh, *Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,”* 1.429.93-100; idem, *Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met,* 16.
would be his. Whereas the author of Matthew characterizes the woman’s cry as a terse plea for aid, Jacob augments the woman’s speech and fashions her into an assertive advocate on her daughter’s behalf.

Through the attribution of non-verbal cries and groans, Jacob vivifies the woman’s expression of personal suffering to include pre-linguistic uses of the human voice. The repentant and sorrowful disposition of the woman would be immediately evident for the Syriac-speaking listener through Jacob’s repetition of the root for groaning and weeping (ܫܢܐ):

With a lamenting voice the woman full of awe went out after him, and with lamentations she petitioned him because of her daughter. ⁵²

His focus on the woman’s laments or groans links this work to his memrā on the woman who anointed Jesus. Earlier in this chapter we explored the ways that voice operates as a theme throughout these works, specifically how the pre-linguistic expressions of the human voice are a verbal image for appropriate worship and reverence. Jacob lauds the “Sinful” woman for her lamentations: “The sound of groans (ܫܢܐ) that were being poured out was more beautiful to him” than the food prepared by Simon the Pharisee. ⁵³

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Throughout the poem this “loud voice” (ܩܠܗ ܪܡ) of the Canaanite woman stands as a marker of the woman’s presence and self-assertion before Jesus.

Through underscoring the persuasive strategies of the Canaanite woman, Jacob evokes sympathy in the listener. As we hear her heartfelt pleas and repeated cries, the silence and reticence of Jesus becomes more troubling and his final acquiescence more understandable. The speech of the Canaanite woman takes on added significance in light of her ethnic identity, a theme we traced earlier in Chapter Three. Jacob’s anti-Jewish polemic, advanced through drawing contrasts between the “peoples” and the Jewish “People,” leads him to map the speech of biblical characters onto this same binary. Whereas Jesus was “announced” or “made known” by the “daughter of the pagans,” Jacob alleges the “People” call him the head of demons (ܐܕܕܝܘ ܪܝܫܐ). Although Jacob’s verbal dexterity is obscured in translation, the two verses in Syriac create an evocative wordplay between the woman’s words “Son of David” (ܕܘܝܕ ܕܒܪ) and Jacob’s allegation that the “People” understand Jesus to be the “head of demons” (ܐܕܕܝܘ ܪܝܫܐ). The phrases occur at the center of consecutive verses, enhancing the rhythmic quality of Jacob’s poetry. The second verse within this couplet is clearly an allusion to the words Matthew ascribes to the Pharisees earlier in the Gospel after Jesus carries out a series of healings since Jacob even uses the same phrasing as the Syriac New Testament for “ruler” or
“leader” of demons. Her proclamation of who Jesus is, Jacob reminds the listener, must be understood through this contrast with the views of a constructed Jewish “other.”

The poet employs a panoply of verbs to depict the speech of this woman as actively proclaiming the Gospel. Here the woman is described as a “harp for the undoubting faith when she cried out, ‘Son of David, have mercy on me.’” Within the Gospel narrative the woman’s words are confined to a plea for aid, but through his poetic narration Jacob renders the Canaanite woman an evangelist:

The new gospel was proclaimed by the Canaanite Woman; and the prophecy was despised (ܡܬܛܡܐܗܘܬ) by the Daughter of the People. The knowers of the Scriptures despised the revelations of prophecy. The worshipers of images became the first ones in the proclamation (of the Gospel). From the treasury of his lexical resources, Jacob describes the Gospel as being “proclaimed” with the verb ﻨ, a root whose semantic range includes the chirping and singing of birds as well as simple speech.

54 Mt 9:34 Gr. Οἱ δὲ Φαρισαῖοι ἔλεγον· ἐν τῷ ἀρχόντι τῶν δαιμονίων ἐκβάλλει τὰ δαιμόνια; Syr. ܕܲܐܲܡܪܝܢܘܬܐ ܒܪܫܬܐ ܚܕܬܐ ܣܒܪܬܐ ܗܘܲܬܙܐ ܒܟܢܥܢܝܬܐ.
55 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.430.127; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 20.
56 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.430.113-116; Jacob of Sarug, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 18. One also finds this language within Jacob’s mēmrā on Ephrem. In this work Jacob praises Ephrem for giving women voices using terms normally used for the noises of birds. For the Syriac text see Joseph P. Amar, The Syriac Vita Tradition of Ephrem the Syrian, Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium 629 (Leiden: Peeters, 2011).
57 Sokoloff, A Syriac Lexicon, s.v. ﻨ.
One reading in translation may miss a lexical link Jacob forms between the earlier characterization of the daughter’s suffering and the description of the fate of “prophecy” under the “Daughter of the People”: they are both oppressed. Using the same verb (ܲܠܡ) as we saw earlier in relationship to the woman’s daughter, Jacob adds an additional layer to the symbolic value of the Gospel story. Given Jacob’s careful attention to language and vocabulary, this linguistic detail deepens the anti-Jewish polemic of the poem. Jacob takes the sentiment one step further, building the contrast between the people who had access to revelation and those who did not. Since the Canaanite woman is a figure for her entire people, the poet claims that the worshipers of idols were the first ones to proclaim the Gospel. Jacob describes the speech of the Canaanite people with the common word for preaching the Gospels (ܟܪܘܙܘܬܐ), a word used for the Greek κήρυγμα. Although these representative examples from Jacob are not exhaustive, they do demonstrate a concerted effort on the part of the poet to praise the speech of this woman, and by extension, the receptivity of her people.

Texts prescribing normative behavior for women feature clear statements regarding the ideal deportment and speech of women in antiquity. Given the presence of garrulous male characters within Jacob’s poetry, one might wonder if the gender of the speaker holds real significance for the poet. Throughout the poem Jacob builds a repertoire of epithets for identifying the Canaanite woman in explicitly gendered terms as a “daughter of the pagans,” “daughter of the Arameans,” and a “pagan woman.” This representation of female speech gains its rhetorical power from her social position as a woman and as a Canaanite.
Throughout this poetry the vocal self-assertion of the Canaanite woman stands at odds with the ideals of femininity as passive and silent before men. However, the verbosity of the Canaanite woman responds to the divine pedagogy of Jesus’s silence. The verbosity of dramatic representations of women within classical Greek literature has often been read against the dominant cultural messages around female speech. Christian poets do not invoke the examples of biblical women to overturn cultural norms. Through emphasizing the extraordinary situation of these women, Narsai and Jacob attempt to circumscribe her example, but they also praise her as an instrument of evangelization. In their role as proclaimers and forerunners of the Gospel, biblical women could partially transcend the constraints of their gender.

4.2.3 The Samaritan Woman

Of the biblical narratives under examination in this study, the Samaritan woman of John 4:4–42 appears garrulous even within the Gospel text. In contrast to the examples of the Canaanite woman, the Hemorrhaging woman, and the “Sinful” woman, the Johannine pericope reverses the order of approach: Jesus engages the woman in dialogue and reveals truths concerning his identity and mission. For early Christian readers, the woman’s responses to Jesus and her “ministry” to her fellow-Samaritans served as key interpretative moments for assessing the woman’s character and gendered

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58 For an examination of the first dialogue and the imagery of “living” water see Chapter Five.
identity. Whereas Romanos shows pronounced care for the Samaritan woman’s response to Jesus’s request for water, Jacob of Serugh offers a protracted rehearsal of the woman’s interactions with her fellow Samaritans. The different points of emphasis lead to two distinct poetic re-narrations. Romanos’s framing of the Samaritan woman’s speech in the mold of Mary allows him to paint a coherent portrait of her as an example of faithful speech. Jacob’s portrait is more ambiguous, ending with a stinging rebuke of the woman as the embodiment of feminine loquacity and foolish pomposity.

The Gospel of John characterizes the woman at the well as a Samaritan fully aware of the boundaries between her people and the Jews who worship in Jerusalem. In response to Jesus’s request for water, the woman cites Jesus’s identity as an impediment, reflecting the historical events that characterized Samaritan interactions with Jews as well as imperial forces, a narrative element accentuated by Romanos:

…… οὐκ ἐτραχύνθη, ἀλλ’ εἶπε ἐλλημμένως. “Και πῶς σὺ Ἰουδαῖος ὃν ἦτήσας με;” υπέμνησε τὸ δόγμα, μετέπειτα τὸ πόρια φρονίμως ἐπηγγείλατο· οὐκ εἶπε γάρ· “Οὐ διδώμι ἀλλοφύλῳ σοι πίνειν”, ἀλλ’ εἶπε· “Πῶς ἦτήσασ; ως ποτὲ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἡ θεοτόκος ἐφή· "Πῶς ἔσται τούτο, πῶς ὁ ἁμήτωρ μητέρα με λαμβάνει ὁ παρέχων |

…….She was not vexed, but said thoughtfully, “And how can you, a Jew, ask me this?” She called to mind the precept, but then prudently provided the drink;

62 Jn 4:7
she did not say, “I am not giving you, a foreigner, a drink,”

but she said, “How can you ask this?” Just as the God-bearer⁶³ said to the angel: “How can this be? How can the motherless one take me as a mother, He who offers jubilance and deliverance?”⁶⁴

Romanos justifies the boldness of the woman’s reply and curtails any criticism of the woman through aligning her with the paradigm of feminine virtue: Mary. As Kate Wilkinson suggests, “The best speech, and the best silence, were carefully controlled and modulated in the style of secular and religious exemplars.”⁶⁵ Romanos does not elide Mary and the Samaritan woman, but he provides an intertextual parallel showcasing the proper occasion for female speech. Cast in the mold of Mary, the woman’s potential transgressive speech is justified.

In addition to drawing a parallel with Mary, Romanos extends the speech of the Samaritan woman to further extol her character and underscore her receptivity to the divine word. As Romanos relates the woman’s continued dialogue to further reflect on Jesus’s words:

λεγέω σοι τὸ θῆλυ καὶ πάλιν πρὸς τὸν πλάστην· “Πῶς ἔτησί με; Ἐὰν σοι δώσω πίνης, πιὼν δὲ μεταβαίνῃς <εἰς> τὸν Ἰουδαϊκὸν θεσμὸν, καὶ λήψομαι εὖ ὀδότας σε ὀμόφρονα ἄνδρα.” Ὅτι καλοὶ οἱ λόγοι τῆς Σαμαρείτιδος· ύποσκιογραφοῦσιν ἐπὶ τὸ φρέαρ τὴν κολυμβήθραν, ἐξ ἡς λαμβάνει δούλην ὁ παρέχων [: ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν; “:] ⁵

Let the woman speak again to her Maker, “How can you ask me this? If I give you a drink, you will overturn the Jewish law by drinking, and from the water I will receive you as a like-minded man.”

⁶³ I.e. the Theotokos.
⁶⁴ Romanos, Hymn IX.6 (XIX.6).
⁶⁵ Wilkinson, Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity, 109.
The words of the Samaritan are so beautiful - they depict in the well the font from which he receives a servant, he who offers *jubilance and deliverance*.

These enigmatic lines are tightly woven around the themes of propriety and the woman’s marital status. Romanos extends the woman’s words: not only will Jesus transgress the Jewish law by drinking, but she “will receive [him] as a like-minded man.” The language here fits within the broader narration by playing with marital imagery to characterize the woman’s relationship with Jesus. In Romanos’s hands, Jesus becomes the woman’s next “husband.” Within these lines Romanos affirms the fitness of the woman’s address to the divine, and he concludes his depiction of the woman’s partial refusal to deny Jesus’s request with praise for her extraordinary speech.

For Jacob, the woman’s initial words with Jesus are part of a larger pedagogical program as Christ lures her to himself. Jacob draws greatest attention to the transgressive nature of her speech toward the end of his poem, but unlike Romanos, he amplifies the woman’s blameworthy conduct. His expansion of the Gospel narrative adds drama and a negative valence to an otherwise neutral account. The author of John’s Gospel attests that the Samaritan townspeople believe “through the word of the woman bearing witness” (Gr. διὰ τὸν λόγον τῆς γυναικὸς μαρτυρούσης; Syr. ܡܛܠ ܡܠܬܗ ܕܐܢܬܬܐ ܗܘܬ ܕܡܣܗܕܐ ܗܝ). Upon their request, Jesus stays with the Samaritans for two days, and through *his* word many more come to believe (Jn 4:40-41). The final mention of the

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66 Romanos Hymn IX.7 (XIX.7).
67 I explore this exchange in Chapter Five.
68 Jn 4:39.
woman occurs in the next verse as the townspeople: “They said to the woman: ‘We no longer believe on account of your words (or speech) (Gr. διὰ τὴν σὴν λαλιὰν; Syr. ميلاء حلاطهν), for we have heard, and we know that this one is truly the Savior of the world.’”

Within the Greek text there is a notable change in vocabulary: while the woman’s word (λόγον) proved persuasive in Jn 4:39, her fellow Samaritans declare in 4:42 that they no longer need her “talk.” The Syriac translations uses the same term to refer to the woman’s speech (ܡܠܛܐ), a generic label without the negative connotations of the Greek “λαλία” in the second instance. These puzzling verses have led commentators to propose competing interpretations to explain the reaction of the Samaritan people to the woman. Some such as Bultmann have drawn on the thought of Kierkegaard to posit that the author of John is distinguishing between “first-” and “second-” hand disciples. According to this reading, the woman is not at fault, but rather the verse reminds us that faith cannot be on the basis of another’s authority.

Within reception history of the Samaritan woman, these concluding verses are often cited in the context of being good “apostles” and evangelists for the faith. In his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Origen commends the woman’s willingness to

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69 Jn 4:42: Some Greek manuscripts replace λαλιὰν with μαρτύριαν, but that does not influence the Syriac. Gr. τῇ τῇ γυναικὶ έλεγον ὅτι οὐκέτι διὰ τὴν σὴν λαλιὰν πιστεύουμεν, αὐτοὶ γάρ ἀκηκόαμεν καί οἴδαμεν ὅτι οὗτός ἐστιν ἀληθῶς ὁ σωτὴρ τοῦ κόσμου; Syr. ميلاء حلاطهν مارثا جنسها مارثاء selon قومها, ميلاء حلاطهν مارثاء جنسها مارثاء.

70 G. Kittel, “λαλέω,” *TDNT* 4.3-5.

forsake her water jar to bring the message to her people, “for by recording the woman’s commendation for those capable of reading and understanding, the Evangelist challenges us to this goal.”  

These verses are significant for Jacob, who pens a particularly harsh portrait of the woman, one imbued with misogynistic tropes from Late Antiquity. While Jacob credits the woman for being the “reason” (حلمة) the people now possess living water, he alleges the woman overstepped her bounds by assuming credit and ownership. Before placing speech in the woman’s mouth, Jacob offers a brief description:

As though the Great Spring that sprang up was her own,
She was puffed up by it, and her spirit exalted and her face uncovered.
Here and there she hastened and hurried among the gatherings,
That everyone might see that she had become aware of living water.
Her face was joyful, her hands were stretched out, her voice became louder,
That the assembly might become aware that she was the one who found the great wealth.  

The root حتر (“to swell up with pride”), suggests a possible intertextual link with 1 Corinthians 13:4. The resonance between Jacob’s verses and Pauline text becomes stronger when one considers the first part of the Pauline verse. 1 Corinthians 13:4 verse specifies the attributes proper to a loving disposition. The introduction to Jacob’s poem is


laced with references to love as providing access to the divine and as a characteristic of receptive faith: “Love is able to open a gate to teaching.” Jacob depicts this woman as acting out of self-aggrandizement rather than love.

The connection between this woman’s visibility and her bombastic speech is not accidental. For both classical and Christian authors, a woman’s vocal reserve preserved her chastity and modesty, but virtuous speech could render her visible without blame. As the poetic narrator falls silent the woman launches into a rapid litany of verses that proclaim the good deeds she has accomplished for her fellow Samaritans. Placing emphasis on the first word of each line, Jacob paints the Samaritan woman in a most unflattering light:

She was saying to the assemblies, “This good thing is from me! I let flow open that fountain to give drink to our city,

74 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.282.25; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 60:

This theme of love as the pre-condition for faith and illumination is found throughout Jacob’s poetry for instance.

75 Cf. 1 Cor 8:1.

76 For a fuller discussion see Wilkinson, Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity, 94-97.

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I perceived this treasure that will enrich our land.
I showed this light to all our people,
I gave this wealth to all our country.
I myself am the cause of this blessing that, lo! You have found,
I opened this door that, behold! You see,
Mine is the wealth, mine the treasure, mine the blessing;
Mine is the treasure, mine the glory that our people saw.
This work full of wonder I have done;
This spring full of life I have opened.
The blessings of our whole city I have brought;
This sun shines forth upon our people because of me!”

The simple diction of these lines approaches parody as the woman gloats over the changed condition of her people. The rhythmic repetition of the first-person pronoun (אֶנָּ) and possessive (דִּלי) emphasizes the woman’s solipsism. As the woman mounts her outlandish claims, one comes to understand the later rejection the woman receives from her own people. What lessons about gender and acceptable behavior do these verses encode?

Jacob closes this mēmrā with the stinging rebuke of the Samaritan woman. His desire to curb the efforts of the Samaritan woman to assume authority reflect larger narrative practices of early Christian authors. Within hagiography, women were often depicted as eschewing traditional modes of feminine action and deportment, only to find themselves “corrected and reminded” within these texts. This abrupt censure of the

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77 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.311.620-632; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 120-122.
78 Exum, Fragmented Women, 136.
Samaritan woman functions as a “textual strategy” to curb the possibility that her speech might provide warrant for women to teach and speak publicly.

4.3 Speech Imagery

4.3.1 The Theme of Speech

The imagery and theme of speech within the poetry narrating the stories of unnamed women in the New Testament coalesces around the trope of the Word of God mediating divine presence. An extension of this theme is imagery of Jesus’ previous healings or of his growing reputation paving the way before him, a theme underscored by all three poets. Except for the Samaritan woman whom Christ approaches, these women respond to what they have heard and learned about Christ. Jacob moves beyond this theme to also consider his own mēmrā as divine speech. Foregrounding the imagery of embodied voices, Narsai embeds the dramatic speech of individual biblical characters within the larger drama of salvation history. Jacob’s introductory verses are rich with self-referential observations about his role as a poet and bearer of inspired speech. Jacob externalizes the mēmrā as an object of consideration, amplifying its agency for conveying divine speech. Within his kontakia on the unnamed women of the New Testament, Romanos shares with his Syriac-speaking counterparts a predilection for the imagery of speech. Whether seeking forgiveness for sin or bodily healing, the female protagonists of these poems respond verbally and physically to the verbal activity of the divine. Here we see how the construction of gender dovetails with the depiction of divinity working through the medium of the word broadly conceived.
Within the poetry of Narsai one encounters the theme of speech as central to the salvific work of the Incarnation. As we have seen in previous chapters, Narsai frames his narration of the Canaanite woman’s encounter with Christ through rehearsing the fall of humanity into sin. Narsai’s mēmrā, “On the Canaanite Woman,” is an important example of his ability to blend dramatic speech with the broader theme of conversation and verbal exchange. His work contains a careful theorization of the human voice as the instrument of spiritual ascent and participation in both the earthly and divine communities. Bridging the macrocosmic and microcosmic condition of the created order, Narsai reminds the listener that the individual suffering of this one woman and her daughter are implicated in a larger web of sin and the degradation of humanity. Rather than rehearsing the events of Genesis, Narsai takes an oblique approach, highlighting the schemes of Satan and the hostile forces working against and through humanity. While we have focused on Narsai’s account of this woman’s genealogy and enslaved state, we have paid scant attention to the theme of speech as essential for the restoration of the created order. According to Narsai, the divine response to the machinations of Satan gains its power through the unparalleled nature of the divine voice:

The bodily one came forth (equipped) with the divine will, and he raised his voice – hidden in that which is revealed – and the demons quivered.
A new voice the rebels heard, one that cried through a body; and they shook and were thrown into confusion by the novelty of the voice which was unusual. The power of the divine Essence roared in creation through the mouth of a mortal; the ranks of the powers of the evil one and of covetous death shook. (The divine Power) called out the sound of Jesus’s name on the earth as thunder, and the demons wailed for they were not able to endure the greatness of the sound.80

These dense verses provide a dramatic vision of the Incarnation and the response of the forces of evil. Narsai deftly weaves together biblical imagery in ways that atomize the body and highlight the power of the divine voice.81 In contrast to the frequent intertextual references and images of Ephrem, Narsai’s verses evoke broader biblical texts (here the Prologue of the Gospel of John 1). The poet does not over-determine the biblical referent, allowing the listener to freely draw connections. Narsai returns to this theme of divine power acting with the world elsewhere in his poetic corpus as a characteristic of the divine nature. Within his mēmrā on the words of John 1:14, “And the Word became flesh” (Gr. Καὶ ὁ λόγος σὰρξ ἐγένετο; Syr. ܢܐܒܡܐܢܐ ܘܡܠܬܐ), Narsai draws much more explicit links to the identification of Jesus with the Word of God.82 Not only does Narsai depict the work of the Incarnation as inescapably tied to speech throughout his larger corpus, but he uses this theme as a lens for understanding the individual pericope from

81 This attention to particular body parts such as the mouth has been studied in conjunction with the Song of Songs; see Steven P. Hopkins, “Extravagant Beholding: Love, Ideal Bodies, and Particularity,” History of Religions 47, no. 1 (2007): 1-50.
82 See, for instance, Narsai, Memra 81 “On the Word became Flesh,”” 2.207: “And his voice became like thunder, and he cried out in the four directions; and fittingly [John] is named ‘Son of Thunder,’ the one who proclaimed the word ‘in the beginning.’” The Syriac text of the full poem may be found in the Homilies of Mar Narsai, vol. 2 (San Francisco, CA: Patriarchal Press, 1970), 206-218. My translation is forthcoming in the Cambridge Edition of Early Christian Writings volume on Christology.
Matthew’s Gospel. Before we ever hear the speech of the Canaanite woman, Narsai foregrounds divine speech at work within the world.

By describing the second person of the Trinity as the “bodily one” (ܡܡܲܠܐ), Narsai emphasizes the embodied nature of this voice which proclaims its salvific sounds through “the mouth of a mortal.” Both Narsai and Jacob describe biblical characters as responding to the “news” or “rumor” of Jesus’s activities, an image for diffuse knowledge despite the silence of the biblical text on the woman’s previous knowledge or motivations. In his poem on the Canaanite woman, Narsai blends the thematic and dramatic use of language as she calls upon Jesus to act in ways that will “seal” the prophetic words of David of which she is well aware. The woman speaks with transparency about her motivations and hopes:

I have heard the news about you, which went out on the earth, and the rebellious ones feared; and I went out so as to witness the revealed truth through experience.

83 Narsai, “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. l. 131-134:

I have heard about the promise of life that David your father received; seal his words by deeds as is becoming of you. For the peace of humanity the divine Hint sent you; bring into action the coming of your love towards those who are divided.
By the name of your power I heard that people are chasing out demons; and I came to receive the good news of your name and to bring it to the demons.\textsuperscript{84}

The woman seeks confirmation of what she has heard and believed about the actions of Jesus. Here the theme of speech and reported witness is wedded to her own speech acts without confusion. The woman’s claim that the “good news” (ܡܪܢܐ) of Jesus’s name possesses the power to dispel demons adds an additional layer to the verbal imagery. Within a few lines, the woman repeats her plea, asking instead for Jesus to “write a letter and sign it with the power of your help.”\textsuperscript{85} Her use of the imperative is clearly marked, underscoring her desperation and her audacious speech. But she does not simply ask Jesus to provide a cure, she commands him to provide the words necessary for healing. The written and the spoken word function in tandem with one another: Jesus’s name as well as the “news” are extensions of his ministry and presence.\textsuperscript{86}

Narsai’s repeated references to Jesus’s name, divine speech, and the power of his word heighten the tension around the core exegetical knot of the New Testament pericope: Jesus’s rigid silence. Narsai invokes the presence of the disciples, reflecting Matthew 15:23: “but [Jesus] did not give a word to her in reply. And his disciples came

\textsuperscript{84} Narsai, “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 206v.
\textsuperscript{85} Narsai, “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 206v:
\textsuperscript{86} The theme of the body as an epistle is a fascinating topic deserving of further treatment. Sebastian Brock has recently treated this image in reference to Mary, see “Mary as a ‘Letter’ and Some Other Letter Imagery in Syriac Liturgical Texts,” Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies 21, no. 1 (2018): 3-20. He does not refer to the present work of Narsai, but the imagery of Christ’s body as a letter is found in “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. l. 131-134. Cf. 2 Cor 3:2-3.

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forward and asked him, saying: ‘send her away for she is calling out after us.’ \(^{87}\) In his poetic gloss on the restlessness and discomfort of the disciples, the poetic narrator underscores the perceptions of the disciples to offer another perspective on the unfolding scene:

The disciples were astonished at the boldness of her voice, at how much she asked, and they approached him and persuaded the Healer to send her away with the power of his help. “Give her a medicine of the word of your mouth as you usually do, and let her go and heal the pain (caused by) the demon who torments her daughter.” \(^{88}\)

Without straying far from the biblical text, Narsai depicts Jesus as caught between the imperatives of the woman and the disciples. His words become a commodity that is given, exchanged, and commanded; within this economy Jesus’s silence halts the flow of words. Throughout these verses Narsai uses the male disciples to point out the audacity of the female voice and the magnitude of her request. Viewed within this frame, the Canaanite woman appears to overstep the boundaries of respectable femininity even more vividly than the biblical author suggests.

Whereas Narsai attaches this theme to the Canaanite woman through her own voice, Jacob meditates on the dispersal of knowledge before featuring her speech. Jacob also delves into the circumstances that led to the encounter, suggesting that it was the

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\(^{87}\) Mt 15:23: Gr. ὁ δὲ οὐκ ἀπεκρίθη αὐτῇ λόγον. Καὶ προσελθόντες οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἢρώτουν αὐτὸν λέγοντες: ἀπόλύσον αὐτήν, ὅτι κράζει ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν ἡμῶν. Syr. ἤρώτησιν τὸν Καναανητην ἀπολύσον αὐτήν, καὶ οἱ μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ἠρώτησιν αὐτὸν ἵνα ἀπολύσῃ αὐτήν πρὸς αὐτήν.

\(^{88}\) Narsai, “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 207r.
“news,” “rumor,” “report” (ܢܐܢܐ) of Jesus that compelled the woman to seek him out. 89

Further on Jacob returns to the idea, adding variety to his vocabulary as is typical of his style: “The report (or news) pressed hard upon the woman full of courage” (ܡܠܝܬܐ ܠܐܢܬܬܐ ܥܐ ̈ ܫܡ). 90 Derived from the root for hearing or listening (ܫܡܥ), the term here emphasizes the aural reception of this knowledge which prompts the woman’s action. Without speculating on the source of this information, Jacob imagines the circulation of knowledge about Jesus as part of the “world” of the New Testament text. 91

Within the poetry of Romanos the theme of words and the diffusion of revelatory speech provide necessary context for understanding the actions of biblical women. Within his narration of the Gospel story of the Sinful woman, Romanos creates continuity between the theme of words and the imagery of perfume that suffuses the work:

Τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καθάπερ ἀρώματα ῥανόμενα πανταχοῦ βλέπον ἡ πόρνη ποτὲ καὶ τοῖς πιστοῖς πᾶσι πνεύμα ζωῆς χορηγοῦντα, τῶν πεπραγμένων αὐτῇ τὸ δυσῶδες ἐμίσησεν, ἐννοοῦσα τὴν αἰσχύνην τὴν ἑαυτῆς

When she saw the words of Christ as fragrance sprinkled everywhere, and providing the breath of life for all the faithful, the harlot at once detested the stench of her own acts,

89 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.428.76: “The rumors impelled the Canaanite Woman to come to him” (ܠܟܢܥܢܝܬܐ ܙܩܬܘܗ ܐ ̈ ܛܒ ܕܬܐܬܐ ܨܐܕܘܗܝ) and again in 1.428.79 “she heard the report that lo the judge of the earth was passing by” (ܐܫܡܬ ܛܒܐ ܕܗܐ ܕԴܝܢܐ ܘܥܠܡܐ ܥܒܪ).
90 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” 1.429.91; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 16.
91 For the personification of “rumor” or word of mouth in classical texts, see Gianni Guastella, Word of Mouth: Fama and its Personifications in Art and Literature from Ancient Rome to the Middle Ages (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 53-66.
As she considered her shame
and thought about the misery caused by her actions.\(^2\)

Within these verses we see how Romanos creates reciprocity between the actions of the
woman and Jesus. The poet also mixes the perceiving senses: she sees (βλέπων) the
words and the scent. The fluidity between sight, hearing, and smell points to the multi-
sensory experience of the divine. This capacious view stems from the conviction that “the
senses were the portals by which human comprehension could grasp more than the
visible, physical place in which one stood. They provided data which the discerning
individual could seek to process profitably.”\(^3\) Romanos sublimates the sense of smell,
wedding it to sight, the more spiritual sense.\(^4\) Within the verbally and sensuously rich
context of the vigil, Romanos holds up the diffusion of Jesus’s words as eliciting our
response just as it did with the Sinful woman, the model penitent.\(^5\)

A final aspect of the theme of verbal expression is the theme of the poetic writing
itself. Here the theme of divine language traces the dissemination of revelation
throughout the created order:

\[
ܪܡ ܗܘ ܡܐܡܪܗ ܡܢ ܠܫܢܐ ܘܡܢ ܣܦܩ ܠܗ܇ \\
ܘܥܠܝ ܫܪܒܗ ܡܢ ܪܥܝܢܐ ܘܡܢ ܡܘܦܐ ܠܗ܇ \\
ܠܐܝܟܐ ܬܪܕܐ ܡܠܬܐ ܒܬܪܗ ܡܐ ܕܡܬܡܠܠ܇ \\
\]

\(^2\) Romanos, Hymn X.1.1-5 (XVI.1.1-5).
More exalted is His mēmrā than the tongue, and who suffices for it?
Loftier is his story than the mind, and who is adequate for it?
How far will the (human) word travel after that which has been spoken?96
And in what place should the mind seek it, if it should find it?97

This one example from the introductory verses of Jacob’s work demonstrates an
integrative vision of revelation, liturgical poetry, and worship. Here the poet prepares the
listener to hear what follows, attributing to the verses a degree of authority. As an
inspired composer, Jacob’s words do not belong entirely to him; rather, he positions
himself as a conduit for the edifying words that follow.

Within the poetry of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos, one encounters dramatic speech
and the theme of speech to varying degrees. A comparative treatment of speech within
their corpora that is sensitive to these differences may be more capacious in scope, but it
will also provide a fuller picture of the diversity among poets in this period. While more
questions than answers remain about the original compositional and performative
locations for this poetry, the contexts of these individual authors harbor the most likely
reasons for differences in their poetic and rhetorical styles. Writing for the vigil and
liturgical settings, Romanos and Jacob frequently dramatize their poetic narrations
through imagined speech. Narsai’s performative contexts appear more varied, and our
knowledge is more tentative.98

96 i.e. the divine mēmrā
97 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.282.31-34; Jacob of Sarug, Jacob of Sarug’s
Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 60.
98 For a lengthier discussion of Narsai’s context within the School of Nisibis, see Chapter One.
to perform before mixed audiences attending worship, but his primary work as the master exegete imbues his work with a more staid, academic tone. This may partly explain the prominence of the vocal expression as a theme and the more selective use of dramatic dialogue and female figures within his poetry. Imagery of speech and writing, prevalent throughout Narsai’s poetry, reflects the theme of divine *paideia* and God as the definitive pedagogue found in the writings of Theodore of Mopsuestia.\(^9^9\) Among the first generation of Syriac writers to imbibe the writings and imagery of Theodore, Narsai’s penchant for study as a model of the Christian life suffuses his verses and molds his interpretation of biblical stories.

### 4.4 Conclusions

This chapter began with an epigraph from Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. His euphoric praise of the human voice reminds us of the privileged relationship between the voice and self-revelation. Although he couches his statements in starkly gendered language and centers the narrator-self as male, this outburst is prompted by the melodious voice of a *woman* within the larger story.\(^1^0^0\) One sees how quickly the male subject erases the gendered identity of the female speaker. In dialectical relationship, Sarah Ahmed reminds us that speech is central to the political and social project of feminist self-realization and the dismantling of patriarchal narratives. This sustained engagement with


\(^{100}\) Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Hyperion* 3.3 “Interlachen.”
narratives of biblical women who spoke and acted willfully attends to the ambiguity of male-authored portraits of feminine zeal. For Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos, hints of willfulness on the part of these women are often sublimated through contextualization and rendered pedagogical through reference to Jesus’s salvific speech and the life of faith.

Syriac and Greek poetry brims with voices, both human and divine. As biblical characters merely sketched through the barest of details, these women exist as illusive subjects beyond the totalizing grasp of the biblical writer, the Christian interpreter, and the modern scholar. Over the course of these chapters, I have gradually unfolded the ways that poets alternatively laud and isolate these women, a trend that echoes efforts of hagiographers to render female saints as “exceptions” and thus mitigate their effect on expectations for normative behavior.101 As Elizabeth Clark observes, “Bodies could be flayed and tossed by wild animals, limbs amputated – but the spirits of these women could not be broken. Such women proved invincible to the highest powers of the state.”102 Within biblical narratives the crushing forces of illness and social pariahdom replace the lions and gladiators of the amphitheater. Through their voices and gestures, these women modeled a faithful style of self-assertion.

101 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story,” in That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity, eds. Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 40–41. “Each holy woman is presented as the exception to her kind, so much so, that she ceases to be of her own kind, becoming instead an honorary male.”

Our poets maintain the distinctions between men and women as they rely on this boundary for the drama of their readings. As biblical women were objectified and rendered signifying presences within male-authored poetry, their “verbal mutability and versatility” as characters rendered them a site of contested meanings.\(^\text{103}\) The Samaritan woman can be alternatively a model for faith and a parody of self-aggrandizement. As David Halperin has observed for the role of Diotima in Plato, gender is essential to the character’s function within the logic of a text: “Diotima’s gender, then, is not a merely peripheral fact or an accidental circumstance, unconnected to her teaching; it is, apparently, a condition of her discourse, and it is inscribed in what she says.”\(^\text{104}\)

Through the consistent use of rhetorical practices such as speech in character, poets shared with homilists the ability to confront their congregations with different characters. We are left to ponder the provocative statement of David Halperin: “What is crucial for Plato’s strategy is not that Diotima presents a woman’s perspective but that she represents it in a form that is recognizable to men.”\(^\text{105}\) As male-authored figures, neither Diotima nor the biblical women here represent genuine female voices, but their presence within these poems fosters an intersubjective reading of the biblical text, a theme we will explore in following chapters on biblical interpretation. Within the poetry of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos, “voice” is a multi-faceted phenomenon. Through

\(^{104}\) David M. Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and other Essays on Greek Love, 117.
\(^{105}\) Halperin, One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and other Essays on Greek Love, 146.
depictions of the divine addressing creation, these works demonstrate a robust theology of progressive revelation. Through foregrounding the female voice against this larger background, poets depicted biblical women as exemplars of Christian *responsiveness* to divine revelation. Blending together the theme of revelatory speech and dramatic dialogue, poets render the boldness of biblical women as a catalyst for the work of the Incarnation.
5. **Bold in Word and Deed: A Feminist Philological Study**

καὶ αὕτη ἐστὶν ἡ παρρησία ἡν ἔχομεν πρὸς αὐτὸν, ὅτι ἐάν τι αἰτώμεθα κατὰ τὸ θέλημα αὐτοῦ ἀκούει ἡμῶν.

And this is the **boldness** we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.

- 1 John 5:14

5.1 **Introduction**

Within the New Testament and later Christian writings, faithful audacity characterized the life of the true believer. The rhetorical strategies of Christian authors, working in a variety of genres, highlighted the boldness of protagonists who upended expectations of normative behavior defined by their social location. Writers of martyrological and hagiographical literature amplified the “spectacle” of Christians defying political and familial authorities through foregrounding female and enslaved believers as they transcended conventional expectations of their station.¹ Humility and boldness were not mutually exclusive dispositions, but rather mutually constitutive modes of faithful witness. Before both God and fellow humans, the ideal Christian spoke

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and acted through the confidence of steadfast faith. According to the writer of 1 John quoted above, the Christian petitioning God experienced such assurance through the proper alignment of the will. This biblical author employs a word found throughout the Gospels and Pauline epistles: the polyvalent concept of parrhēsia (παρρησία).

Alternatively rendered as “confidence” or “openness,” this term, familiar to those conversant in classical philosophy, represents only one concept among a broader array of terms and expressions Christians used to differentiate licit and illicit forms of audacity.

Employing biblical as well as extra-biblical vocabulary in their compositions, Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos constructed multifaceted portraits of biblical women. While we have already examined the ways female corporeality, ethnicity, and voices are scripted within these poetic narrations, this chapter undertakes a study of the language authors deployed to characterize the self-assertion of biblical characters. Here I pursue the ever-shifting presence and identity of the “feminine” in male-authored texts through examining the “production and organization” of meanings through language. I aim to bring the paradoxes and ambiguities of boldness into sharper focus through undertaking a detailed philological study of the vocabulary and rhetorical strategies of early Christian poets. Bold initiative in act and speech forms a theme throughout the biblical stories at

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2 Christian boldness, especially open speech or parrhesia is often connected with the liturgy, as we shall see. Within modern Orthodox theological discourse this connection between self-assurance and the liturgy is described as the proper grounding for facing the challenges of modernity. See John Behr, “With Boldness and Without Condemnation,” St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly 51, no. 4 (2007): 359-369.
4 There are several introductions to philology and debates surrounding its place within the modern university. One helpful point of entry is Jan Ziolkowski, “What is Philology?: Introduction,” Comparative Literature 27, no. 1 (1990): 1-12. To borrow the words of Ziolkowski, this philological analysis is
the heart of this study. As the biblical writers (and later poets) narrate tales of women interacting with Jesus, they depict instances of divine and human interactions fraught with tension arising from unequal power relations. In the process of reimagining biblical women for late antique and early Byzantine audiences, poets cultivated a vocabulary and a set of rhetorical strategies for capturing the virtuous boldness of women who approached Jesus and experienced a revelatory encounter with the divine. Attention to the lexical choices of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos illumines how these poets received biblical language and adapted their vocabulary through practices of interpretation and narration.

Over the course of previous chapters, we have explored female figures whose bodily actions and speech challenged and even transgressed social boundaries. By mapping the range of terms the authors use, we see how the poets constructed this feature of Christian life through refining their lexical resources. This section of the larger project ventures to combine the tools of feminist and philological analysis to show that male authors constructed boldness as a delicate and potentially precarious feature of Christian faith. Through a capacious philological analysis, linking linguistic-historical with narrative analysis, I trace how the constellation of terms for boldness signal the ongoing

undertaken according to the traditional understanding of philology as “restoring to words as much of their original life and nuances as we can manage.” A more thorough analysis may be found in Sheldon Pollock, “Philology in Three Dimensions,” *Postmedieval: A Journal of Medieval Cultural Studies* 5, no. 4 (2014): 398-413.

contestation of the boundaries of femininity. While audacity does not adhere exclusively to female figures, gender imbues the portrayals here under examination. The dangers of transgressive female impudence – as in the case of Eve – dramatize the risks attendant on the performance of boldness in the Christian life. Through subverting their listener’s expectations about female comportment, Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos project idealized, complexly gendered portraits of piety. As we shall see, each of these writers offers us varied poetic constructions of “woman,” ranging from the vile seductress to models of conversion. In their accounts, the virtuous and immoral examples of audacity provide an additional layer to the reception history of biblical literature.

While earlier chapters have featured close readings of individual poems, here I employ a comparative approach to see how invocations of “boldness” and “audacity” either bear similarities or evolve across texts. Such a reading of these poems underscores differences between Syriac and Greek lexical resources for describing “boldness,” broadly conceived. The Syriac poets Narsai and Jacob frequently underscore the explicit quality of audacity exemplified in these women, developing specific terms such as ḥuspā (חושפאה). Syriac writers also devote more time to narrative exposition due to the extended, contemplative style of the mēmrā. In contrast, Romanos’s dramatic, dialogue-driven compositions leave less space for his narrating persona to meditate on the nature of the women’s faith. His occasional use of the term for free speech or openness

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6 Mika Ahuvia and Sarit Kattan Gribetz, “‘The Daughters of Israel’: An Analysis of the Term in Late Ancient Jewish Sources,” The Jewish Quarterly Review 108, no. 1 (2018): 1-27. In this piece Ahuvia and Gribetz not only sketch the genealogy of this term within Jewish sources, but also show that authors deploy the phrase “daughters of Israel” to signal female agency in the formation of Jewish law and practice.
(parrhēsia), however, offers the modern reader a heretofore unexplored stage in the evolution of this concept within the Greek-speaking Christian world. Syriac possessed the Greek loanword for parrhēsia, but Narsai and Jacob do not apply that term to the speech of New Testament women. While extensive literature exists on parrhēsia, this chapter approaches a more nebulous notion of “boldness” in the exercise of human agency through mapping the terms our three poets used to signify and construe faithful audacity.

As early Christians consumed this poetry, they imbibed nuanced moral and theological messaging. Authors drew stark binaries between biblical figures whose monitory functions served to accentuate the laudable features of exemplars. In what follows, I approach faithful boldness and self-assertion as a feature of the Christian life variously fashioned within these poems. Singling out boldness as a character trait for analysis is not an arbitrary narrowing of scope since this quality structures the performance of faith depicted in all of these works. This poetry emphasizes the role of love and genuine faith as fundamental to a rehabilitation of audacity. Sanctified audacity challenges familiar visions of Christian piety, standing not in contrast to humility but as its necessary complement. Poised between zealous faith and impudence, boldness emerges as a construct, a carefully choreographed posture toward divinity and other humans, as well as a delicate balance that must be continuously maintained.

5.2 Redemptive Audacity: Introducing Syriac Terms for Boldness

Of the three poets at the heart of this study, Narsai attends to female biblical figures less frequently than Jacob and Romanos. Nevertheless, his mēmrē featuring
female protagonists frequently invoke the concept of audacity, contributing to the
gendered connotations of this term. Following in the footsteps of their literary forebear,
Ephrem, Narsai and Jacob destabilize “safe” portraits of female piety as they show how
seemingly immoral actions can mask hidden virtue. This tension between appearances
and reality parallels another binary within their thought: that of hidden divine realities
and revealed truths. These poets examined how characters exercised personal agency and
displayed their moral and spiritual qualities.

Laying bare these constructed subjectivities for his listener, Narsai – along with
other Christian poets – exposed the dangers and potential advantages of emboldened
actions. In light of Narsai’s sustained attention to the concept of faithful audacity, I will
privilege his works in what follows, but I will incorporate analogous passages and
theoretical moves in the work of his younger contemporary, Jacob of Serugh. Both Syriac
poets approach boldness as defined through the presence (or absence) of proper
motivations, chiefly love. As we have explored in previous chapters, Narsai examines the
contours of the inner life of the Canaanite woman to trace the movements of her soul. In
what follows I step back from the specific mēmrā on her story to understand how Narsai

Tradition,” in Studies on Patristic Texts and Archaeology: If These Stones Could Speak, Essays in Honor of
Dennis Edward Groh, eds. George Kalantzis and Thomas F. Martin (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press,
2009), 29-50. In this article Harvey examined Ephrem and Jacob’s exegetical strategies around biblical
women who display a “paradoxical witness.” Women such as Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba
demonstrate that “God’s purpose is worked even when all existing codes of sexual propriety are broken.”
Throughout this project we have seen Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos accentuating the seemingly
“paradoxical” holiness of New Testament women. This chapter continues to examine the ways poetry
pressed the boundaries of conventional forms of holiness, but we shall attend more acutely to their choice
of vocabulary.
applies the language of boldness in his other works featuring female protagonists, namely his mēmrē on Eve and the women before Solomon. Triangulating between these three works, we see how a range of lexical terms emerge as particularly potent signifiers for audacity. Jacob and Narsai share in common a predilection for highlighting examples of boldness. Through turning their perceptive gaze to the character’s inner disposition, they exhort their listeners to shun multiple forms of impudence so often associated with the exercise of independent feminine agency and to emulate the fervent love of figures such as the Canaanite woman.

While Syriac boasted a variety of words for “daring,” Narsai returns to a handful of terms frequently. For our Syriac authors, the noun “boldness” (ḥuṣpā ܚܘܨܦܐ) possessed both positive and negative valences, frequently invoked in concert with the verb “to act rashly” (mraḥ ܡܪܚ). While applying these terms to both remarkable and disreputable biblical women, Narsai and Jacob foreground the role of love and faith as the proper motivations for assertions of the self. Narsai’s works are especially notable for his attention to the Janus-faced nature of boldness. By attending to the motivations of his characters, the boldness of the saintly is strictly differentiated from the brazen impudence of the wicked.

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8 David Konstan, “The Two Faces of Parrhēsia,” Antichthon 46 (2012): 7-10. Writing about parrhēsia in ancient Greece, Konstan observes that the “negative side” of parrhēsia was a “boldness to say things that are not dishonest – quite the contrary – but rather brazen, contrary to decorum and decency.” Max Radin’s study of the concept in connection with Attic comedy also queried traditions about the limits of such “free speech” (“Freedom of Speech in Ancient Athens,” The American Journal of Philology 48, no. 3 (1927): 215-230). The ambiguity of boldness as a theological virtue is constantly at play for our poets regardless of the exact term they apply for it.
5.2.1 Eve

Narsai’s vitriolic treatment of Eve is a particularly striking example of how these terms can be applied to construct the dangerous female “other.” Narsai’s mēmrā, “On the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters and the Tricks and Devices They Perform,” contains a relentlessly negative portrait of the first woman and a virulent rehearsal of misogynist stereotypes. As one of the only poems translated and available featuring women in Narsai’s poetry, this mēmrā has often been understood as a definitive statement of the author’s hostility towards women. The poem recounts the events of Genesis 1-3, but Narsai transitions smoothly between the impudence of Eve in the garden and the treachery of contemporary women. Warning his male listeners to exercise caution and exhorting women to emulate the matriarchs, Narsai emphatically invokes the gender binary as an inescapable feature of human existence. Only proper discernment offers the individual the possibility for successfully navigating the pitfalls inherent in the mingling of the sexes. Building his case against women as “daughters of Eve,” Narsai

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9 The Syriac text may be found in A. Mingana, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, vol. 2 (Mosul: Dominican Press, 1905), 353-365. For an English translation and introduction see Corrie Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters and the ‘Tricks and Devices’ they Perform,” *Le Muséon* 106 (1993): 65-87. I have largely followed Molenberg’s translation, and I will indicate when adjustments have been made.


11 Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). The work of Carolyn Walker Bynum has shown that modern scholars must exercise caution when extrapolating from imagery the details of a particular audience.
invokes the examples of Joseph and Samson as further cautionary tales.\textsuperscript{12} The poet deliberately avoids direct reference to Potiphar’s wife (Genesis 39:1-18) and Delilah (Judges 16:4-22), erasing their individuality and rendering them instantiations of a single gendered principle of vice and chaos.

Within the opening lines, Narsai vividly depicts Eve within the Garden of Eden: “She smeared the color of impudence (\textit{huspā}) on her face in (that) beautiful place, and she was not ashamed of talking with the deceitful one.”\textsuperscript{13} The “beautiful place” is Eden, recalling the scene of Eve’s undoing as she consorts with Satan. Narsai compounds the meaning of \textit{huspā} by using it in conjunction with the word for color (\textit{ܟܪܘܡܐ}), a loanword from Greek (\textit{χρῶμα}), whose semantic range in Syriac includes “blushing” as well as “shamelessness.”\textsuperscript{14} For Narsai, Eve is the paradigmatic example and source of all feminine vices; his vocabulary and imagery provide a layered indictment of her wickedness. Attached to the character of Eve, the term \textit{huspā} signifies her breach of the primordial precept out of prideful overreach and a lust for power. Associated with the figure of Eve at the outset of the poem, the term \textit{huspā} conjures images of her ill-fated legacy for her descendants. For Narsai, the self-assertion of Eve offers Christians a cautionary tale of unchecked female agency.

\textsuperscript{12} Mingana, \textit{Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina}, II. 353.12; Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters,” 83.

\textsuperscript{13} Mingana, \textit{Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina}, II. 353.12; Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters,” 76 [trans. alt.]:

\textsuperscript{14} Michael Sokoloff, \textit{A Syriac Lexicon}, 648 s.v. \textit{ܟܪܘܡܐ}. 
The congenital wickedness of Eve possesses explanatory value for the degradation and desperation of the human condition according to early Christian authors across linguistic lines. Later on within this same poem, Narsai will ascribe this same boldness to all women: “The color of their face is impudent (ḥaṣṣīp), their conversation is presumptuous (marrāh), meeting them leads into sin, and who does not suffer from their very abominable passions?”15 Through the bonds of kinship, all women throughout the generations share in Eve’s vice-ridden exercise of self-assertion.16 Within this passage we also find the root ܡܪܚ which shares a similar semantic range with ḥuṣpā, an apt example of how Narsai elaborates through constructing a lexical network of mutually enforcing terms. Used in tandem, these words magnify the condemnable nature of women who violate the proper boundaries of female comportment.

Read in isolation, the example of Eve appears to render the exercise of boldness irredeemably wicked. Standing at one pole of the spectrum, Eve’s boldness is foreclosed to the possibility of remediation. For Ephrem and later Syriac authors, however, there are additional avenues audacity can take. The terms themselves do not change but their meanings shift to express more positive valences of personal initiative. Two common roots that offer the possibility of transformation are ḥṣp (ܚܨܦ) and Ӧrḥ (ܡܪܚ), which appear in Syriac biblical texts, but which differ in their frequency and range. One familiar

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15 Mingana, *Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina*, II. 357.8-9; Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters,” 79-80 [trans. alt.]:

16 Cf. Ephrem, *Eccl.* 37.3. This sentiment is shared broadly across early Christian authors across linguistic divides. Ephrem, for instance, laments Eve as the “source of all misfortunes” (ܚܠܐܥܐ ܡܠܡ ܫܡܐ)}}
with the Hebrew ḫuṣpā (חֻצְפָּה) will readily recognize the Syriac word. Even for English-speakers, this semantically rich term evokes the sense of brazen self-assertion and the testing of acceptable boundaries. Within the Syriac New Testament, the noun ḫuṣpā appears only once in Luke 11:8 as a translation of the Greek word for “impudence” or “shamelessness”: ἀναίδεια. The NRSV translation shows how critical the valences of this term are for capturing the sense of the verse: “I tell you, even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, at least because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs.”17 Within this context the translation “persistence” is a reasonable rendering, but this flexibility underscores the ambiguity of words for boldness in ancient and modern languages; words signifying “audacity” may be employed positively while retaining their more negative valences.18 Terms for boldness continually totter between the acceptable and the unacceptable, reflecting the inherent risk of overstepping boundaries within interpersonal relationships. The dynamic of gender only intensifies these dynamics of human (let alone human-divine) relationships.

While it appears rarely in the biblical text, Ephrem uses the verbal root ḫuṣ and related nouns at several points within his poetry. One instance where Ephrem employs a form of the verb ḫuṣ in a way reminiscent of Luke 11:8 may be found in his Hymns on


18 LSJ, 9th edition, s.v. ἀναίδεια.
Faith. Here Ephrem urges the Christian to “ask boldly for [God’s] help.” In light of humanity’s need and dependence on the divine, a degree of shamelessness is pardonable (and in fact necessary) for the pursuit of holiness. Earlier scholarship in Syriac studies has frequently called attention to the ways that Ephrem and others employed the rhetoric of paradox in their expositions of Christian theology. The playful use of paradox may be better described as a fearless exploration of seemingly disreputable individuals.

Within Ephrem’s poetry, scandalous figures feature as uncut gems: their virtuous facets shine forth only when he carves into the redemptive value of their stories to reveal their hidden brilliance. If Eve forms one category of irredeemable impudence, there also exists a contiguous cohort of figures whose boldness served positive ends. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, in her examination of the women in the genealogy of Jesus according to Matthew 1:1-16, queried the ways Syriac authors vindicated maligned biblical figures such as Rahab and Ruth. She observes that elaborate exculpatory readings of biblical females allowed authors like Ephrem and Jacob to implicitly counter criticisms of consecrated women whose celibate lifestyle the larger society denigrated. Attention to shifts in language and the expansive semantic ranges of terms reveals further implications and dimensions of Harvey’s observations. While poetry featuring morally questionable acts of biblical women confronted audiences with “discordant or disruptive notions of

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order,” Harvey avers that examples of boldness enshrined within literature did not reflect social realities; the bold self-assertion of biblical women did not necessarily translate into greater permissiveness for female actions and public speech. Encrusted with such rhetorical tropes, these stories of reversed expectations underscore the unpredictable and latent power of grace to transform lives seemingly mired in sin.

Further examples demonstrate the adaptability of terms to shifting contexts. In contrast to the relatively rare occurrence of نܡܪܚ within biblical literature, one finds the verb mrḥ ( maxHeight), “to be rash” or “to dare,” with greater frequency. In Exodus 21:14 it appears within the litany of laws given to Moses: “But if someone willfully attacks ( maxHeight) and kills his friend with guile, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution.”

Across the books that make up the Syriac New Testament the verb mrḥ occurs twenty times in various forms. In sixteen of those occurrences the Syriac translator uses the root to render the Greek verb τολμᾶω, “to venture or dare.” One illustrative example comes from 1 Corinthians 6:1: “Would any of you while having a lawsuit against his brother dare to stand trial before the unjust and not the holy?” After the crucifixion of Jesus, we are told that Joseph of Arimathea “dared” to approach Pilate.

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21 Harvey, “Holy Impudence, Sacred Desire,” 75.
23 George Anton Kiraz, A Computer-Generated Concordance to the Syriac New Testament, 3.1740-1742. Cf. Mt 22:46; Mk 12:34; Mk 15:43; Lk 20:40; Jn 21:12 (of the disciples); Act 5:13; Act 7:32 (of Moses); Rom 5:7; Rom 15:18; 2 Cor 10:2, 12; 2 Cor 11:21; Phil 1:14; Jud 9:3.
24 LSJ, 9th edition, s.v. τολμάω.
25 Gr. Τολμᾷ τις ὑμῶν πράγμα ἔχων πρὸς τὸν ἔτερον κρίνεσθαι ἐπὶ τῶν ἁδικῶν καὶ οὐχὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἁγίων; Syr. ܐܠܟܐ ܡܫܐܕܬܒܠܐ ܟܡܟܡܟܐ ܣܠܫܐ ܡܢܐ ܒܢܟܠܐ ܡܕܒܚܝ ܕܒܪܝܗܝ ܠܡܩܛܠܗ.
and ask for the body in Mark 15:43. The role of boldness in relationships is defined here by a power differential.26

While space does not allow us to undertake an exhaustive examination of these biblical uses, the root *mrḥ* appears in one text significant for the history of women within Christianity. In 1 Timothy 2:12, “I permit no woman to teach or *to have authority* over a man; she is to keep silent (NRSV)” (διδάσκειν δὲ γυναικὶ οὐκ ἐπιτρέπω οὔδὲ αὐθεντεῖν ἀνδρός, ὄλλ᾽ εἶναι ἐν ἡσυχίᾳ). The Syriac translator uses the infinitive form of *mrḥ* (ܠܡܡܡܪܚܘ) for the Greek infinitive *αὐθεντεῖν*.27 The uses of *mrḥ* in Exodus and 1 Timothy feature the preposition לְּ directly after the verb: “to act rashly against.” This choice of the Syriac translator demonstrates a broader semantic range of *mrḥ* than we have seen in previous examples; this term for boldness encompasses the presumptuous exercise of power. For the astute listener in Narsai’s and Jacob’s audiences, this association of *mrḥ* with other texts from their sacred scriptures would have formed an intertextual link. As this vocabulary punctuates their *mēmrē*, the negative implications of boldness are continuously connected to women, creating a sustained portrayal of feminine depravity and overreach as endemic to humanity. Nevertheless, this root could be used in the context of faithful actions as examples from the New Testament and early Syriac literature show.

26 Gr. τολμήσας εἰσῆλθεν πρὸς τὸν Πιλᾶτον καὶ ἠτήσατο τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Ἰησοῦ; Syr.

27 Syriac New Testament for 1 Tim 2:12:
As Narsai establishes lexical nodes within an ever-expanding web, he continues to draw on words with ambiguous connotations. Another term with biblical antecedents is the familiar word ܢܢܐ translated as “zeal” or “jealousy” as distinct from ܚܣܡ “envy.”

In his mēmrā on Eve and her Daughters, Narsai addresses a “woman” – a placeholder for all women – and exhibits the potentially positive orientation of this term:

Your wicked zeal I saw running on the sea and on dry land, and I exerted myself to restrain it lest the world would be troubled by its course. Your raging envy I saw provoking the good ones and the evil ones, and I thought it might be possible to stop it so that it would cease for a while.

The English translation masks the clever word play and shifts in vocabulary Narsai deploys. The poetic narrator gains prominence within these lines, aggressively confronting and undermining the feminine other. The first line foregrounds the wicked eagerness or zeal (ܢܢܐ) of “woman,” constructed through concatenated misogynist stereotypes. As the first line flows into the second, the verb root appears at the outset, but in this verse it characterizes the narrator rather than the vilified addressee. The use of

28 Sokoloff, A Syriac Lexicon, 538 s.v. ܢܢܐ. The verb ܢܢܐ may be translated as “being eager or aroused” or “to be zealous or jealous.” Molenberg renders both ܢܢܐ and ܚܣܡ as zeal, which glosses over the nuanced differentiation of Narsai’s usage (“Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters,” 86).
29 Mingana, Narsai doctoris syri homiliae et carmina, II. 364.9-12; Molenberg, “Narsai’s Memra on the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters,” 86 [trans. alt.].
The root within the New Testament is instructive for understanding Narsai’s verses. The translator of 1 Corinthians 14:1 uses this same verb to render the Greek ζηλόω: “Pursue love, eagerly desire (ζηλοῦτε) the things of the spirit, especially so that you might prophecy.” Narsai’s use of the verb to characterize the narrator’s endeavor to thwart the aims of his female opponent resemble the use of the verb in 1 Corinthians. The intentionality of the male speaker serves as a correction to reckless feminine desire. More importantly for the purposes of this chapter, it demonstrates the conditional nature of ardor and self-assertion as dependent on motivation and intention. Eve and her offspring, embodied in the generic “woman” within Narsai’s work, pose a clear but surmountable threat to the unwavering faith of the poetic narrator. Unequivocally condemned for her “impudence” according to Narsai, woman’s reckless pursuit of her own desires and willful action forms the antithesis of the poet’s projected sanctity.

5.2.2 The Women Before Solomon

The acerbic tone of Narsai’s poem on “Eve and her Daughters” stands out from the more academic tenor found in his works on other biblical themes. While his exposition of Eve and the stereotypical vices of women was fertile ground for cultivating an array of terms for boldness, Narsai’s larger corpus provides further evidence for his ongoing fascination with the theme. In mēmrā 75, “On Solomon, on his Election, and on his Judgment,” Narsai returns to the language of boldness when narrating the competing

31 Gr. Διώκετε τὴν ἀγάπην, ζηλοῦτε δὲ τὰ πνευματικά, μᾶλλον δὲ ἵνα προφητεύητε; Syr. קְרָאתֵּם אֲלֵיהֶם מִלָּהוּ לְפָנֵי אֱלֹהִּים וַיְקָרְבוּ אֶת דְּמָשְׂקִּים בְּאֶפֶס を かわら かわらを かわら かわらを かわra to
claims of the two prostitutes who seek King Solomon’s judgment (1 Kgs 3:16-28). This compelling biblical story of one mother wickedly stealing another’s infant after the death of her own provides the raw materials for painting contrasting portraits of feminine agency.

While Narsai includes passages of dramatic speech, he narrates the events at length, drawing attention to the inner deliberations of Solomon as well as of the two women. The mother of the living child before Solomon stands as a troubled figure whose life reveals the limitless extension of grace. The contrast between the distraught mother and the wicked kidnapper does not function as a simple contrast of love and boldness. The earnest mother exercises a justifiable tenacity when pursuing her case:

The armor of boldness the mind of the bold one wore, and she began speaking out that the dead babe was not hers. As into a contest the two women fell for affection and boldness, and they contended over the prize of the living babe.32

As we have seen so often over the course of this study, the dramatization of biblical stories within late ancient poetry emphasizes the role of struggle in the spiritual development of protagonists. Using the Greek loan-word ἀγών (ἀγών), Narsai pits these two women against one another in a test of wills. Within his mēmrā on the

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Canaanite woman, Narsai offers a similar vision of a courageous mother “donning” armor in defense of her child.\textsuperscript{33} Within both poems, the grasping, bitter impertinence of an opponent serves as a foil for the pluck and perseverance of maternal affection.

Narsai’s layering of instructive contrasts continues breathlessly as he narrates the growing discord between the women before their audience with Solomon. In the verses that follow he once again shifts course, attributing boldness to the wicked mother rather than the virtuous one:

\begin{verbatim}
ܐܡܗܕܚܝܐܒܙܝܢܐܕܚܘܒܐܡܬܟܬܫܐܗܘܬ܇ܘܐܡแหละܡܡܝܬܐܒܙܝܢܐܢܟܝܠܐܕܣܪܘܒܘܬܐܬܫܐܚܘܨܦܐܓܪܓܗܠܚܘܨܦܢܝܬܐܬܚܛܘܦܡܓܢ܀
\end{verbatim}

The mother of the living one with the armor of love contended, and the mother of the dead one with the armor of impudent deceit. Mercy compelled the mother of the living one to seek her own, and boldness (ܚܘܨܦܐ) provoked the impudent one to steal freely.\textsuperscript{34}

Here the “boldness” (ܚܘܨܦܐ) of the deceitful woman contrasts with the love (ܚܘܒܐ) and mercy (ܪ̈ܚܡܐ) of the mother of the living baby. Narsai projects the binary of feminine virtue and vice onto the two women, opposing love and audacity, but his verses resist the stable attribution of the quality of boldness. Only the mother of the living child displays love. As a result, the characterization of the central figures not only gains depth, but the boldness ascribed to these women reveals its versatility. While both women are described

\textsuperscript{33} Narsai, \textit{Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman”} (ms. D70, f. 210v):

\begin{verbatim}
ܐܘ ܠܟܝܐܡܐܡܪܚܡܢܝܬܐܟܡܐܪܒܚܘܒܟܝ܇ܕܠܒܫܬܝܙܝܢܐܠܘܩܒܠܒܝܫܐܕܫܒܐܠܒܪܬܟܝ܀
\end{verbatim}

O you, merciful mother, how great is your love
That you donned armor against the evil one who had captured your daughter!

\textsuperscript{34} Narsai, “On the Women Before Solomon,” II.801.
by the biblical author as prostitutes, Narsai suggests early within the poem that they occupy the same social location without being equal in character. The poet invites his audience to peer beyond the trappings of social station: the mother of the living child may be a prostitute, but her flaws render her expressions of penitence more compelling. Through the flawed, grace shines forth to expose unrealized virtue.

5.2.3 Tamar

While the negative valences of ܚܘܨܦܐ are deployed by Syriac authors to characterize the wickedness of Eve and the guilty prostitute before Solomon, the larger corpus of Syriac poetry and prose contains several instances of authors rehabilitating the quality of boldness as we have seen in the character of the loving mother. This development occurs most clearly in poetic narrations of the story of Tamar. The story of Tamar and Judah, found in Genesis 38, resists facile attempts to produce an edifying interpretation, providing a perfect example of how apparent impudence could disguise genuine faith. In his mēmrā on this Genesis narrative, Jacob of Serugh uses both the term ḫuspā and the verb mrḥ to describe Tamar’s actions toward Judah. Jacob

37 For the Syriac edition and English translation see Sebastian Brock, “Jacob of Serugh’s Verse Homily on Tamar (Gen.38),” Le Muséon 115, no. 3-4 (2002): 279-315; the text is found with identical line numbers in Paul Bedjan and Sebastian P. Brock, eds., Homilies of Mar Jacob of Sarug (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006; first published 1902), VI.255-266.
contextualizes Tamar’s machinations through rehearsing the virtues of the matriarchs and reminding his audience of Ruth’s pursuit of Boaz. Breaking the flow of his narration, Jacob addresses the object of Tamar’s love and the true motivation for her actions: “It was for you, O Son of God, that she was gazing out, (waiting for) You to come to her, and it was because of you that she despised women’s nobility.”

Jacob deftly introduces a typological substitution of Jesus for Judah, leading his listener to see the New Testament type in the Old Testament narrative. Motivated by such divine love, Tamar dons the dress of a prostitute and goes out “to fall in with a merchant on the road, like some impudent woman ((ܚܨܝܦܬܐ)).” In these lines Jacob limns the figure of the licentious female, but he holds together Tamar’s inner affective disposition with her appearance.

Jacob exploits the juxtaposition of brazenness with faithful boldness as he gleans moral instruction from her story. Having completed his narration, Jacob closes the mēmrā with an exhortation for his audience. In these lines Jacob impresses upon his listener the symbolic potential of the narrative’s details:


38 Sebastian Brock, “Jacob of Serugh’s Verse Homily on Tamar (Gen.38),” 284 (trans. 296) l.129-130
39 Sebastian Brock, “Jacob of Serugh’s Verse Homily on Tamar (Gen.38),” 284 (trans. 296) l.135-136:
Faith is the king’s signet ring at which judgment’s fire feels awe when it is kindled against the audacious (ܡܪ̈ܚܐ). The ring for Tamar, and the faith for the Daughter of the Peoples quenches the burning flame amidst the fire.⁴⁰

Here Jacob reminds his reader of the signet ring mentioned in Genesis 38:18 and 38:25, one of the items that Tamar demands of Judah and ultimately uses to prove her innocence. These verses recall the polemicized binary of the “daughter of the People” and the daughter of the peoples” we explored earlier in connection with the theme of ethnicity. Sebastian Brock’s almost translation maintains the rhythmic word order as Jacob begins the first verse and ends the third with “faith” (ܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ), underscoring the centrality of faith for lending the boldness a positive valence. Within this passage it is difficult to understand the charge of the term for “audacious” (ܡܪ̈ܚܐ). It would seem most reasonable to read ܡܪ̈ܚܐ as those stubborn unbelievers who face the flames. Through the word order and rhythm of the concatenating verses, Jacob contrasts faith and boldness, attributing a negative association to the the latter. Over the course of the poem as a whole, Jacob creates a distinction between the laudable boldness of Tamar and the censurable recalcitrance of the “impudent.”

5.3 Laudable Audacity: The Canaanite Woman

Surveying negative depictions of female impudence and narratives of redeemed audacity, the dynamic nature of these terms becomes apparent. The narratives of

⁴⁰ Sebastian Brock, “Jacob of Serugh’s Verse Homily on Tamar (Gen.38),” 291 and trans. 302.397-400.
unnamed New Testament women under examination in this study exhibit the positive pole of the semantic range of these terms. Both Narsai and Jacob compose mēmrē on the New Testament pericope of the Canaanite woman from Matthew 15:21-28 (often identified with the “Syro-Phoenician woman” of Mark 7:24-30), providing a perfect comparison for their construction of holy boldness. Only extant in manuscripts until now, Narsai’s mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” has been absent from modern studies of his oeuvre. As I have argued previously, this text provides a fruitful site for the comparison of his interpretative and artistic habits with those of his slightly younger contemporary, Jacob. Within Narsai’s poetic corpus, this poem also resonates with his mēmrā “On the Reproof of Eve’s Daughters” which we discussed above.\(^{41}\) Jacob emphasizes the woman’s identity as a Gentile beyond the bounds of Israel by structuring his poem along a binary comparison between the “People” (i.e. the Jews) and the amalgam of “peoples.”\(^{42}\) In this literary construction of the Gentile woman, Jacob emphasizes her love as all the more remarkable in light of her Gentile identity. In his mēmrā on her story, Jacob calls attention to the poetic Canaanite woman with this prefatory couplet:

\[\text{ܐܝܢܐ ܕܡܚܒ ܠܐ ܡܬܓܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܐܢ ܡܡܪܚ܇ ܟܠ ܡܘܢ ܕܐܡܪ ܚܘܒܐ ܠܕܝܠܗ ܡܬܩܒܠ ܗܘ܀}\]

\(^{41}\) For a more thorough comparison of Narsai’s and Jacob’s treatments, see my forthcoming chapter: “From Sketches to Portraits: The Canaanite Woman within Late Antique Syriac Poetry,” in the volume of papers from the VII North American Syriac Symposium, eds. Robin Darling Young and Aaron Butts (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press).

Whoever loves is not rebuked even when acting rashly (مَمْرَارُ); Whatever Love says to its own is acceptable.\(^{43}\)

While telling her story, our author sets an interpretative frame for the actions which follow. Jacob shifts from the individual experience of the biblical woman to a more abstract confirmation about the disposition of the agent of bold acts. These verses envision an affective, confident disposition grounded in love, a stance closely resembling the notion of *parrhēsia* found in the New Testament and liturgical prayer. Through the alchemy of love and faith, audacity emerges as an integral part of the Christian life.

In Narsai’s narration of the woman’s story, her identity as a Canaanite is explicated through a rehearsal of the lineage of Ham. Subject to Noah’s curse, the woman recounts her slavery to Satan, and the verbal exchange between Jesus and the woman expands into a larger discussion concerning the possibility of transforming the conditions of her servitude. Amplifying her marginality, Narsai renders her faith remarkable, perhaps shaming his audience to evaluate their own dispositions.\(^ {44}\) As Narsai explains Jesus’s enigmatic silence at the woman’s initial plea, he clarifies the pedagogical motivations behind the Savior’s reticence:

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\(^{44}\) Foregrounding the virtue of a woman was a common strategy of late ancient authors to shame the men in their audiences, see Elizabeth A. Clark, “Sex, Shame, and Rhetoric: En-gendering Early Christian Ethics,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 59 (1992): 221-245.
Not as one unwilling to heal did he turn away and remain silent, but He (wanted) people to gain boldness (חوفق) when asking for mercy. By her boldness (חوفق) He taught everyone to be bold (חوفق) in (asking for) his aid, and not to grow weak if one does not receive (aid) quickly.⁴⁵

For the attuned ear, the repetition of the same consonants (ḥṣp) adds a pleasing rhythm to the second and third verses as Narsai slowly unfolds Jesus’s aims. As a model for faithful endurance, the Canaanite woman’s boldness is far removed from the form we encountered in the wicked woman before Solomon. Shameful impudence lacks the potency of faithful audacity in Narsai’s account. The efficacy of the woman’s dogged pursuit of Christ leads Narsai to depict her “boldness” as difficult for the demons to bear.⁴⁶ The term (חوفق) becomes integral to the larger portrait Narsai (and Jacob) create of a courageous mother. These early Christian poets constructed this woman “of the peoples” as the “other,” emphasizing her Gentile identity and lowly status. Both poets embellish and expand the biblical text, crafting her character as a paradigmatic convert as well as a figure of unparalleled boldness.

Expressing this same sentiment, Jacob reflects further on the responsiveness of the divine to human boldness. Over the course of sixteen verses, Jacob describes the

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⁴⁵ Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 207v.
⁴⁶ Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 210r.
Canaanite woman’s speech, movement, and disposition, unfolding the nature of boldness.

Within the first six verses of this section the poet underscores the woman’s persistence:

Boldness (ܚܨܝܦܘܬܐ) opens his treasury and it was clear for her; and as much as she wants she collects riches from his treasury house. Had the Canaanite woman grown weary when she was held back, not even the boldness of her faith (ܚܘܨܦܐܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ) would have been praised. Jesus rejoiced that she crossed the threshold boldly (ܚܨܝܦܐܝܬܐ); and if you do not grow weary, he will enlarge your faith.⁴⁷

Throughout these verses, Jacob composes a paean to the role of virtue in the spiritual life. The poet’s insistence on the necessity of boldness would be unmistakable for his listener as the root Ṣܡʿ recurs several times. As she overcomes spiritual weariness, the Canaanite woman exercises her agency forcefully but correctly. For Jacob, the woman’s example proves a useful example for denouncing complacency in the life of faith.

Boldness, unequivocally positive here, propels the individual believer. The poet’s vision for the spiritual life paints a contrast between boldness and lassitude (ܡܐܢ). Echoing the stirring exhortation of Narsai, Jacob employs the example of the Canaanite woman to exhort the listener to shake off spiritual lethargy. Here boldness is not only an inner quality, but a means of gaining access to the divine.

⁴⁷ Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” L.442-443.373-378; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 44.
This remarkable passage continues with a description of the Canaanite woman’s performance of bold faith. As a précis of the biblical narrative, the verses distil the pivotal features of her tale:

The woman grasped him in the midst of the crowd with a loud voice; and while they were rebuking her she did not cease [from seeking] his aid. And she did not listen to him that she should turn back from him when she did not receive; She grasped him in love, and he granted her requests. And then he changed course. She disputed with him, and he praised her because she was victorious; For love has the power not to be rebuked even if it acts daringly (ܟܕܡܡܪܚ). Oh behold, woman, how very great is your faith! He revealed her to the multitudes so that everyone might act boldly (ܕܢܚܨܦ) and imitate her. Her boldness (ܚܨܝܦܘܬܗ), which is full of wonder, take for yourself, O man! and through it [i.e. boldness] you will be able to expel suffering when it enters you.48

This lengthy section gains coherence and rhetorical power from its insistent repetition of the vocabulary for boldness. Like Narsai, Jacob spends several verses describing and praising the nature of the woman’s faith, revolving around these now familiar terms for audacity shorn of negative valences. Any negative connotations of ܟܕ are absent from

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48 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 17 “On the Canaanite Woman,” I.442-443.379-388; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 42-44.
Jacob’s account. Returning to his favored image for God’s abundance – the divine “treasury” – Jacob exhorts his listeners to exercise their own agency in pursuit of this treasure.\(^4^9\) The crowd around Jesus plays an integral part in the poetic narrations, supplying an obstacle for the female protagonist to surmount. The crowd attempts to dissuade her from her pursuit, but she perseveres. As the poet intensifies his description and heightens the drama of the social pressures placed upon this woman, he dramatizes the woman’s experience beyond the Gospel account. According to Jacob, the woman not only overcomes her opponents, but resists rebuke through love.

As Jacob describes the woman’s interaction with Jesus, he subverts expectations of normative feminine deportment. If we bear in mind the strictures placed on women’s movement, speech, and social interaction in the ancient world, we hear differently Jacob’s depiction of the woman physically crossing boundaries, grasping, and calling out. As a biblical interpreter, Jacob does not dampen the role this woman’s initiative played in the unfolding of the narrative: she debated (ܕܪܫܬ) with him, and Jesus changed his course. She petitioned, and he obliged. Daring not only gains access to the divine, it also elicits a response. In the passage quoted above from Narsai there is strong emphasis on the pedagogical aims of Jesus’s reluctance. While Jacob upholds Jesus’s prescient handling of the encounter, his reverent account of the woman’s boldness accentuates the woman’s

\(^{4^9}\) The bold actions of these women and the interpretative strategies of Syriac poets may raise questions of agency and grace for readers living subsequent to the Western Protestant Reformation. While the question of agency deserves fuller treatment, I would suggest that Syriac poets frame these women’s actions as a necessary part of Christ’s larger pedagogical scheme within the economy of salvation. Authors such as Jacob hold together the woman’s agency with divine foreknowledge in a non-competitive understanding of grace and nature.
agency. At the end of this passage, Jacob exhorts his audience to emulate this woman’s audacity. Although this work was presumably performed before a mixed audience, the poet tellingly uses the male vocative, “man” (ܓܒܪܐ) to prod his listeners to emulate the biblical exemplar. While the boldness of the Canaanite woman as a distraught mother is exemplified in her actions and words, it remains incumbent upon all Christians to adhere to her example. These poetic narrations of the Canaanite woman’s tale reflect a distilled and powerful discourse around boldness within late ancient poetry. Unlike accounts of Eve and other problematic biblical figures, works about the Canaanite woman display an unambiguously positive portrait of boldness.

5.4 The Boldness of the Sinful Woman

Laudable audacity features prominently in the interpretative traditions that arose around other New Testament figures as well. In his mēmrā on the Sinful Woman (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 12:1-11), Jacob applies the language of boldness to the pursuit of repentance, the dominant theme he will pursue within his narration. He beseeches his listener to maintain hope: “Let whoever sins not cut off hope, but let him be bold like the prostitute, and then he will be forgiven.”

The Sinful woman, popular throughout Greek and Syriac literature, had a varied and extensive Nachleben among late ancient poets and homilists. Within the broader field of Syriac literature we find further

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50 See also Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman” D70 f. 212r.
51 Jacob of Serugh, Homily 51 “On the Sinful Woman,” II.404.454-46. The translations of this mēmrā are largely my own, but I have consulted the translation published in Jacob of Sarug, Jacob of Sarug’s Homily on the Sinful Woman, trans. Scott F. Johnson (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2013).
evidence for the interpretative traditions surrounding the bold actions of the Sinful Woman. In 1984 François Graffin published three anonymous homilies on the Sinful woman found in British Library manuscript Add. 17181.52 Dated to the sixth century, these homilies on Luke 7:36-50 draw strong contrasts between the actions of the woman and the Pharisee.53 Here the author playfully presents the woman’s “boldness” (ܐܒܝܒܐ) as advantageous: “For she acquired a beneficial boldness, and she entered the home of the Pharisee but did not feel ashamed.”54 Later in the homily the author praises the shrewdness of this woman who “boldly dared to enter and draw near [Jesus’s] feet while bowing her face to the ground.”55 The author of this sermon artfully juxtaposes the characterization of her entrance with her humble bodily posture. According to this author Jesus’s deference to the woman was part of his pedagogical strategy: “By his longsuffering spirit he proclaimed (ܡܟܪܙܗܘܐ) her patience, and by his negligence he showed her boldness.”56 This reading, resonant with Narsai’s and Jacob’s interpretations


53 William Wright, Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum (London: Gilbert and Rivington, 1871), 2.661-668. On the basis of the “fine, elegant Estrangela” hand, Wright dated the manuscript to the sixth century. The manuscript location of these homilies, a subject deserving of its own study, is fascinating blend of homiletic compositions treating subjects of biblical interpretation along with ascetic tracts geared to a monastic audience. The texts of this manuscript are all anonymous. In addition to addressing quotidian affairs such as silence at the table and how the rich ought to accustom themselves to common life, the manuscript ends with discourses on the feast of the Epiphany, Hebrews 7, and three on the female sinner from Luke 7:36-50.

54 Graffin, “Homélies anonymes du VI siècle,” 454:

55 Graffin, “Homélies anonymes du VI siècle,” 458:

56 Graffin, “Homélies anonymes du VI siècle,” 462:
of the Canaanite woman’s story, displays a similar capacity to hold together seemingly incompatible qualities. Resisting the logic of mutual exclusion or narrative closure, this interpreter challenges their readers to appreciate the multiple trajectories of the biblical story.

5.5 To Cry Out Fearlessly: Parrhēsia in Romanos

Within the ancient and late ancient world, the term *parrhēsia* evolved through competing political and philosophical trends. Previous diachronic studies have shown the complex usages and evolving semantic range of the Greek term.57 *Parrhēsia* is often translated as “freedom of speech,” “boldness,” “frankness.” While scholarship often approaches this as a technical term, they do not treat the poetry of Romanos. Romanos uses the word more loosely, often in the sense of speaking “openly” or “publicly.” Within the ancient Greek world, *parrhēsia* was an integral part of political life within the *polis*, the purview of a citizen within a democracy.58 Erik Peterson and scholars after him have stressed the absence of the word from Homer or the Greek poets, implying that it is not a


“poetic term.” Michel Foucault’s genealogical study underscores that whoever speaks with *parrhēsia* undertakes an enormous risk, acting out of a sense of obligation and reflecting a “personal relationship” to the truth. While the ancient Greek usages Foucault foregrounds differ in significant ways from later Christian invocations, his focus on the individual’s relationship with the truth may supply a continuous thread through various instances of the word’s use.

The word παρρησία evolved from its origins in classical Athenian democracy. Within Athenian political life, the term referred to the right of free speech enjoyed by all full citizens within the polis. The ideals of Athenian democracy were wedded to conceptions of friendship based on equality and freedom. Individuals who possessed full civic status could speak with their fellow-citizens freely. Male citizens, motivated by the desire to aid and promote mutual self-growth, employed παρρησία in the civic arena. Philosophical accounts of friendship enshrined this same form of intimate and frank speech as characteristic of idealized relationships among equals. As Athenian democratic structures gave way to Hellenistic kingdoms and foreign rule, the concept of παρρησία underwent profound shifts. Political structures which once preserved notions of equality among free male citizens gave way to governance at the hands of monarchs and the aristocracy. Accordingly, the ideology of “free” speech shifted from notions of mutuality

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to proscribing flattery and deception. Idealized \textit{parrhēsia} was increasingly understood as a private virtue to be exercised within the context of friendship rather than a political right. No longer the liberty to proclaim one’s views in the civic sphere, \textit{parrhēsia} was the obligation of friends to speak candidly to one another.

\textbf{5.5.1 Philodemus of Gadara, Romanos, and Parrhēsia}

Another Greek-speaking Syrian, Philodemus of Gadara (110 BCE – c. 40/35 CE), proves an illuminating interlocutor. His work \textit{On Frank Criticism} stands as the sole example of a composition dedicated exclusively to the subject of \textit{parrhēsia} still extant. His influence on New Testament authors has been an emergent area of research.\textsuperscript{62} \textit{On Frank Criticism} is not a sustained treatise, but rather a series of lecture notes recording the teachings of Zeno of Sidon, an Epicurean teacher with whom Philodemus had studied in Athens.\textsuperscript{63} One of the recurrent themes within Philodemus’s \textit{On Frank Criticism} is the pedagogical value of measured candid communication.\textsuperscript{64} While he is principally concerned with the appropriate use of \textit{parrhēsia}, Philodemus also envisions philosophically advanced social equals as benefiting from such verbal exchange:

\begin{quote}
Some, perhaps, having a private affection [for the wise man] or wishing to have it, may be frank toward him. If, then, the wise men recognize each other, they will be reminded pleasurably by one another in the ways we have made clear, as also
\end{quote}

by themselves, and they will sting each other with the gentlest of stings and will acknowledge gratitude [for the benefit].

This illustrative passage underscores not only the pedagogical value of *parrhēsia*, but also the ability of such exchange to draw individuals into closer relationship. Despite the irreconcilable differences between Epicurean and Christian cosmologies and theologies, common ground existed in the areas of pedagogy and the value placed on pursuing wisdom.

Although relatively rare in the Septuagint, its appearance in Job 27:10 demonstrates a significant expansion of the term in comparison with classical uses: *parrhēsia* characterizes the confidence of the righteous before God. This facet becomes increasingly prominent in later Christian usage, and forms the point of entry for understanding the instances of the term in the poetry of Romanos. Within the genuine *kontakia* of Romanos, the term *parrhēsia* occurs twenty-three times. Often related to speech and candor, Romanos uses the term in diverse ways, reflecting the breadth of its semantic range. While Narsai and Jacob specify that the boldness of these women advances them along the path of holiness, Romanos employs the word *parrhēsia* to

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67 NETS Translation: “Does he have any confidence before him? Or as he calls upon him, will he listen to him?” (μὴ ἔχει τινὰ παρρησίαν ἔναντι αὐτοῦ; ἢ ὡς ἐπικαλεσαμένου αὐτοῦ εἰσακούσεται αὐτοῦ;); the Peshitta reads: “If he *trusts* in the Almighty and calls always upon God, God will answer him and listen to him”:
describe the social interactions of biblical characters without explicitly praising their
audacity. Romanos captures these characters in the midst of audacious acts and speech,
but he does not develop terms of boldness as an aspect of the life of faith. This antecedent
enriches the drama of these stories as Romanos frequently pivots between a female
protagonist, the crowd of male followers, and Jesus. In what follows we will examine a
few representative passages from Romanos.

5.5.2 The Sinful Woman

Scholars of Greek and Syriac late antique literature have long attended to
Romanos’s kontakion on the Sinful woman who anoints Jesus with oil, rendering it one
of his most well-studied works. In his poetic narration of the Sinful woman, Romanos
assumes that accounts in all four canonical Gospels (Mt 26:6-13; Mk 14:3-9; Lk 7:36-50;
Jn 12:1-11) relate the story of a single woman. One of the core themes Romanos extracts
from these accounts is the faithful solicitousness of the woman as she makes every effort
to please Christ. Romanos uses the term parrhēsia in his kontakion as part of the
woman’s address to the perfume seller. The conversation between the woman and the
perfume-seller, an expansion to the biblical text, features the woman as a forceful and
assertive interlocutor:

Ὡς δὲ ίδὼν τῆς σεμνῆς τὸ θερμὸν καὶ πρόθυμον
φησίν αὐτῇ · “Λέξον μοί, τίς ἐστίν ὁν ἀγαπᾷς,
ὅτι τοσοῦτον σε ἐπέθελε πρὸς τὸ φίλτρον;
ἀρα κἂν ἔχει τι ἄξιον δοῦαι τοῦ μύρου μου;”
παραπτὰ δὲ ἡ ὅσια ἣ ν φονήν
καὶ βοᾷ ἐν παρρησίᾳ τῷ σκευαστῇ τῶν ἀρωμάτων;
· “Ὅ ἀνθρώπε, τί λέγεις μοι · ἔχει τι ἄξιον;
οὐδὲν αὐτοῦ ἀντάξιον τοῦ ἀξίωματος;
οὖκ ὀύρανός, οὔτε γαία · οὐδ’ ὅλος τοῦτω ὁ κόσμος

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Seeing the fervor and eagerness of the godly woman, He said to her: “Tell me who is it whom you love, That he beguiled (charmed) you to buy a love charm? Does he have something truly worthy of being given my perfume?” At once the holy woman raised her voice, And called out in frank speech (ἐν παρρησίᾳ) to the preparer of fragrance: “Sir, what are you saying to me? Does he have something worthy? Nothing is worthy of his lofty dignity - neither sky, nor earth, nor the entire universe that is his - Is comparable to the one who hastens to deliver me from the filth of my deeds.”

This particular strophe introduces us to the perfume seller, an extension of the biblical narrative that has been studied for the possible link it forms between Greek and Syriac literature.\(^69\) Within this passage the indignation of the woman prompts her rapid retort, but it also leads her to proclaim the grandeur of Christ. As the Sinful woman raises her voice, she also assumes the position of a teacher offering correction and rebuke, the critical function of parrhēśia in the writings of Philodemus.\(^70\) One could read the force of parrhēśia as purely a social “frankness” as the woman corrects this man. Its position at the center of the strophe could also suggest that the force of the word extends to all that

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\(^{68}\) Romanos, Hymn X.10.1-11 (XXI.10.1-11).


follows, conditioning her speech as an instructive and sharp rebuff to the perfume seller.\textsuperscript{71}

5.5.3 The Samaritan Woman

The biblical account of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:1-42) invites Romanos to embellish the woman’s speech and amplify her desire for Christ. Her community does not have an active role in the story, but their frequent invocation keeps them in the listeners’ thoughts. As a solitary representative of her people, the Samaritan Woman represents her village in her dealings with Christ. For Romanos, the woman’s act of hospitality toward a thirsting Christ disguises the larger beneficence her actions bestow upon her people.\textsuperscript{72} Latching on to the theme of exchange, Romanos explains the significance of John’s text through tracing the economics of gift in a market ultimately structured through divine grace. In conjunction with the Samaritan woman, we see that \textit{parrhēsia} not only characterizes the speech of the faithful, but represents a desirable trait of Christ’s speech as well. The term appears as part of the woman’s address to Christ:

\begin{quote}
Μὴ ἀρα σὺ ὑπάρχεις, Χριστός, ὃν οἱ προφήται προείπον ὅτι ἔρχεται; ἐὰν σὺ εἶ ὡς ἔφησαν, παρρησία εἰπέ μοι· ὅρω γάρ ὅτι ὅντως, ἃ ἔπραξα γνωρίζεις καὶ τὰ τῆς καρδίας μου κρύφια πάντα· <καὶ> διὰ τούτο καθικετεύω γνώμη, ἵνα λάβω χαῖρε ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν:
\end{quote}

Are you not the Christ whom the prophets foretold would come?  
If you are, as they said, speak freely (παρρησία) to me,  
For I see that you know precisely what I have done and all the secrets

\textsuperscript{71} Possible parallel with Acts 4:29-31.  
\textsuperscript{72} Romanos, Hymn IX.1-4 (XIX.1-4).
of my heart; and therefore
I entreat mindfully, so I may receive
Jubilance and deliverance.\textsuperscript{73}

In the context of this particular *kontakion*, the sense of *parrhēsia* is shaped by the surrounding lines. Romanos uses the term here in the senses of “open and honest,” but it seems significant that the woman is the one who seeks it. The Samaritan woman has already displayed awareness of the social boundaries that curtail free exchange between a Jewish man and a Samaritan. Within the context of the poem, composed for the edification of the Christian listener, this is also a *parrhēsia* of revelation. The Samaritan woman, as a type for the Christian believer, invites Jesus to speak and share his knowledge freely. The poetic Samaritan woman invites Christ to exercise *parrhēsia* as she seeks his frank response.\textsuperscript{74} The Samaritan woman undertakes the risks attendant to *parrhēsia*: rejection and rebuke from one in a superior social position.\textsuperscript{75}

*Parrhēsia* belonged to the political and philosophical worlds, that is, to the world of men. As Romanos scripted the dialogue between Jesus and the Samaritan woman, he depicts the Samaritan woman as forceful. By introducing *parrhēsia* to an exchange between Jesus and a woman, Romanos raises intriguing questions about the intersection of gender and open speech. This example stands as the only instance of a woman granting

\textsuperscript{73} Romanos, Hymn IX.17.4-10 (XIX.17.7-11).
\textsuperscript{74} H. Schlier, “Παρρησία, Παρρησιάζομαι,” TDNT 5.877-878. This attribution of *parrhēsia* to Jesus appears to be rare within the New Testament.
such permission to a man within Romanos’s oeuvre, undermining any efforts at comparison within his genuine kontakia.

The ideology of speech within the ancient world reinforced gendered hierarchies and perpetuated stereotypes about feminine intellectual capacities. How does gender intersect with the evolving conceptualization of parrhēsia? Philodemus, for example, provides some brief but illuminating remarks on the female resistance to frank speech. According to Philodemus, women mistake parrhēsia for outright criticism, allowing themselves to be “crushed by the disgrace” rather than benefiting from it. Philodemus claims that women would rather be pitied than corrected by those “stronger” than them: “Hence they quickly reach [the point of] tears, believing that they are being reproved out of contempt.”

Philodemus does not speculate on whether the female vices he posits are the result of natural capacity or cultural habituation. By contrast, the Samaritan woman according to Romanos invites Jesus to speak with her openly. In light of Philodemus’s unflattering picture of women avoiding criticism, further interpretations of Romanos’s composition come to light. Read in light of Philodemus’s comments on women, the Samaritan woman’s eagerness for frank exchange subverts expectations of gendered forms of pedagogy.

76 Philodemus, On Frank Criticism, XXIa.; For the Greek and translation see Konstan, et al., Philodemus: On Frank Criticism, 124-125.
5.5.4 Parrhēsia and Male Characters

Both the previous examples are associated with female speech, but Romanos did not use parrhēsia exclusively in conjunction with female gender. The use of parrhēsia in relationship to male characters is also instructive with respect to the ways the word may be understood within a larger constellation of terms. In his kontakion “On the Resurrection,” Romanos relates the story of Mary Magdalene and the male apostles outside the empty tomb, pulling from Matthew 28 and John 20:1-18 without strict adherence to the biblical text. Romanos builds the dramatic tension by focusing exclusively on the women lamenting before the tomb.\(^78\) Mary Magdalene goes ahead of the other women, and she encounters the risen Christ, who takes pity on her weeping and lamentation.\(^79\) Romanos supplies an extensive description of the male disciples puzzling over the empty tomb. After hearing Mary’s experience at the empty tomb, Peter and James rush forward to the tomb and hurry inside. In an unusual turn, Romanos has the apostles compare types of boldness. Surmising that their “boldness” has been too great, the apostles create a contrast: “Has our boldness turned into audacity?”\(^80\) Through the juxtaposition of these two words, Romanos creates a distinction between positive and negative forms of boldness. Within the same strophe James and Peter express their concern that they have been deemed unworthy, but it is Mary who assures them that this order was part of the divine plan. Just as women were the first to fall, Mary suggests, they

\(^78\) Romanos, Hymn XXIX.1-4 (XL.1-4).
\(^79\) Romanos, Hymn XXIX.9 (XL.9).
\(^80\) Romanos, Hymn XXIX.5 (XL.5): Περιετράπη οὖν ἡμῖν ἡ παρρησία εἰς τόλμαν. Note the Doric form of τόλμαν.
will be the first to see the risen Christ. Mary as the female character assures the male apostles that they have not overstepped their proper boundaries.

5.5.5 Parrhēsia and the Confidence of the Saved

Among the diverse usages of parrhēsia in the kontakia of Romanos, one observes that the term frequently denotes the assurance of the blessed before God. When recounting the parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-13), Romanos characterizes the confidence of the saved:

Ὁ τῶν ἀγγέλων δὲ χορὸς θαυμάζει ὑπακούων Χριστοῦ τοῦ βασιλέως ταῖς πέντε μαρτυροῦντος ταῖς εἰσελθούσαις σὺν αὐτῷ. ὤ τῆς παρρησίας τῶν ἀγίων τοῦ Χριστοῦ μεγίστου τε καυχήματος· ἐπὶ τοσούτων δήμων κομίζονται ψήφον ἀφθαρσίας· ἐπὶ τούτων και αἱ ἄλλαι ἀπόφασιν δέχονται ἐσχάτην και κλαύσωσι πικρῶς ἐπὶ τῶν ἀγίων ἔχοντας ἐξ ἐλέου τῇ παρρησίαν, πάντας φοροῦντας τὸν ἀφθαρτὸν στέφανον.

Upon hearing Christ, the king, the chorus of angels was amazed and they were a witness for the five who had entered with Him. O freedom (ὅ τῆς παρρησίας) of the saints of Christ, (which is) their great source of pride!

Before all these people they receive the vote of immortality and also before these wise virgins; the others as well received the ultimate decision, and as a result they weep bitterly with unceasing lamentations. When they see the chorus of saints Possessing the confidence (τὴν παρρησίαν) that comes from the compassion, All of them carrying off the imperishable crown.

81 This genitive (ἐλέου) introduces a degree of ambiguity. This compassion either consists in the mercy they have been shown or their own mercy for others.
82 Romanos, Hymn XLVII.27.1-10 (XXXI.27.1-10).
This freedom is not related to speech, but rather their disposition before the divine. This usage resonates with the various instances of the word in Hebrews 3:6 “Christ, however, was faithful over God’s house as a son, and we are his house if we hold firm the confidence and the pride that belong to hope.”83 Such confidence is not divorced from their speech as the virgins assert themselves verbally throughout the work.

Our final examples will be associated with kontakia that dramatize events from the life of the Virgin. Here Romanos gestures towards a way that parrhēsia lives on within Byzantium: Mary as intercessor. A paradigmatic example of Romanos’s use of the term appears in his hymn on the Annunciation. As he stages the exchange between Mary and the archangel Gabriel, Romanos imbues Mary’s character with the confidence to scrutinize the angel’s claims: “I have seized more boldness (θάρσος); with greater freedom to speak (παρρησίαν) I shall debate with you.”84 As Thomas Arentzen observes, the contrast between Romanos’s depiction of Mary as a modest and virtuous maiden fits the ideals expected of young women in his audience, but “her authority and confidence proves to be much greater than one would expect from a Constantinopolitan maiden.”85

As we saw earlier, Romanos relates the speech of the Samaritan woman to Mary’s

83 Gr. Χριστὸς δὲ ὡς νυός ἐπὶ τὸν οἶκον αὐτοῦ· οὗ οἶκός ἐσμεν ἡμεῖς, ἐάν τὴν παρρησίαν καὶ τὸ καύχημα τῆς ἐλπίδος κατάσχωμεν; For text and commentary see Harold Attridge, Hebrews: A Commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews, Hermeneia: A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 110-112.
84 Romanos, Hymn XXXVI 6.5 (IX.6.5): Ἐλαβον θάρσος λοιπὸν· πολλὴν παρρησίαν κεκτημένη συζητῶ σοι.
interaction with the Gabriel. Mary sets the standard for bold speech that is imitated but never rivaled by the unnamed women elsewhere in Romanos’s poetry.

The kontakion with Mary at the cross is a piece full of drama and pathos, but it also contains the seeds of the intercessory role that will be attributed to Mary increasingly in subsequent centuries. In the final strophe the poet addresses Christ, praising his nature as fully human and fully divine:

σὺ εἶ ἐν τῷ πάσχειν καὶ ἐν τῷ μὴ πάσχειν·
σὺ εἶ θνῄσκων, σώζων· σὺ παρέσχες τῇ σεμνῇ
παρρησίαν κράζειν σου·
|
| “Ὁ υἱὸς καὶ Θεός μου.” :|

You are the same when you suffer and the same when you don’t suffer. You are the one who dies and saves. You gave to your august (mother) the boldness to call out to you: My son and my Lord!86

This motherly parrhēsia captures the privileged relationship between Mary and her son. While further research could link the portrait of Mary’s parrhēsia with the liturgy, this offers an example of the persistence of the positive use of parrhēsia. The invocation of parrhēsia within the liturgy offers an important insight into the reception of this term among Christians and its role within the spiritual life. One of the most well-known hymns, the Akathistos Hymn, tied this freedom or confidence to Mary: “Hail, freedom of speech (παρρησία) of mortals towards God” (χαῖρε, θνητῶν πρὸς θεόν παρρησία).87

Within the Divine Liturgy of John Chrysostom, we find further evidence for associating

86 Romanos, Hymn XIX.17.7-10 (XXXV.17.7-10).
this quality with liturgical speech. During the anaphora (ἡ ἁγία ἁναφορά), the priest is
directed to quietly pray that all partakers in eucharist receive “freedom to speak in your
presence, not judgement or condemnation” (εἰς παρρησίαν τὴν πρὸς σὲ, μὴ εἰς κρίμα, ἡ
κατάκριμα). Before the congregation recites the Lord’s Prayer, the priest once again
brings to mind the ideal of Christian confidence before God: “And count us worthy,
Master, with boldness and without condemnation to dare to call upon you.” This
boldness to approach the divine in prayer characterizes confident faith.

5.6 Parrhēsia: A Bridge between Greek and Syriac Language for
“Boldness”

The reception history of New Testament literature in the multilingual region of
the eastern Mediterranean allows us to trace the shape of linguistic interaction and
development. Through its sustained contact with Greek over the course of Late

88 The Greek text and attendant English translation may be found in The Divine Liturgy of our Father
Among the Saints, John Chrysostom (Oxford University Press, 1995), 34.
89 The Divine Liturgy of our Father Among the Saints, John Chrysostom, 39: Καὶ καταξίωσον ἡμᾶς,
Δέσποτα, μετὰ παρρησίας, ἀκατακρίτως τολμᾶν ἑπικαλεῖσθαι σὲ τὸν ἐπουράνιον Θεὸν Πατέρα, καὶ
λέγειν. We should also add here Gregory Nyssa’s use of parrhēsia in relationship to the Lord’s Prayer. The
Syriac liturgy also retains use of the loanword in their anaphoras.
90 While Romanos and liturgical use of parrhēsia retain the positive role of boldness in the life of the
Christian, it is important to keep in view the negative valences of parrhēsia in ascetic literature such as the
Apophthegmata Patrum. In his study of the terms πένθος (“grief”) and κατάνυξις (“compunction”) in
eastern Christianity, Irénée Hausherr marshalls references to parrēsia from ascetically-minded authors. In
his discussion of the vices belonging to the category of vanity, Hausherr observes that parrēsia was
symptomatic of the individual’s self-regard, and such boldness on the part of the monk threatened to
undermine their sense of grief over sin and lowliness before God. While parrēsia retained a positive sense
of confidence when one is in possessions of a sound conscience, the term could also capture the danger of
“excessive liberty of words or manner.” Irénée Hausherr, Penthos: La doctrine de la componction dans
l’orient chrétien. Orientalia Christiana Analecta 132 (Roma: Pont. Institutum Orientalium Studiorum,
1944), 107-108; also available in English translation: idem, Penthos: The Doctrine of Compunction in the
91 For a thorough and recent study of how contact with Greek changed Syriac vocabulary, morphology, and
syntax see Aaron Michael Butts, Language Change in the Wake of Empire: Syriac in Its Greco-Roman
Context (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2016). Syriac writers themselves reflected on their literary

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Antiquity and the early Byzantine period, Syriac absorbed a number of loanwords along with morphological and syntactical traits. As literature crossed linguistic boundaries through the work of translation, language contact shaped Syriac writers at the linguistic and conceptual levels. In addition to the range of Syriac terms shared by Narsai and Jacob, the term parrhēsia (Gr. παρρησία, Syr. ܦܪܣܝܐ/ܦܪܗܣܝܐ) serves as a lexical link between our Greek and Syriac authors. While we see a range of terms in Syriac emerging for gendered acts of boldness, the word parrhēsia does not appear within Syriac poetry on New Testament women. The exclusion of this term from the constellation of related terms we have traced demonstrates the more restrained use of the word within Syriac literature. In contrast, Romanos extended the scope of the term parrhēsia beyond the usage of the biblical authors through applying it to a broader range of biblical stories. As both Greek and Syriac poets continued to use the term in the fifth and sixth centuries, their patterns of usage show complex relationship to earlier, formal meanings and intentionality in its deployment across linguistic boundaries.

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tradition, often reflecting the changing political and religious climate in which they found themselves. For an overview of a more historically grounded view of the transmission and construction of the Syriac literary tradition see Lucas Van Rompay, “Past and Present Perceptions of Syriac Literary Tradition,” Hugoye: Journal of Syriac Studies 3, no. 1 (2000): 71-103. As Van Rompay observes, the theological controversies of the fifth and sixth centuries intensified the influence of Greek on Syriac literature (74). Butts, Language Change in the Wake of Empire, 1-5. In addition to Greek loanwords, Syriac also adopted vocabulary from Akkadian, Sumerian (via Akkadian), various forms of Iranian, Hebrew, Middle Persian, and eventually Arabic. For a diachronic analysis of the orthographical conventions that mark the adoption of parrhēsia in Syriac, see Butts, Language Change in the Wake of Empire, 81-82.
Within the scholarship on the manifold ways *parrēsia* appears in the New Testament, Syriac has been used to better understand its biblical usage. The Peshitta New Testament does not employ the loanword for every instance of *parrēsia* in the Greek text. In 1962, W.C. van Unnik composed a study of *parrēsia* in Syriac to demonstrate that Syriac speakers understood this term in the sense of “openly” (lit. “with an uncovered eye”) which replaces several instances of the Greek *parrhesia*.

The Greek *parrēsia* came into Syriac through a number of forms which underscore the sense of openness. Here I would like to highlight one which bears significance for the depiction of biblical women. In telling the story of the Hemorrhaging woman, Jacob uses the term *pursāyā* (ܦܘܪܣܝܐ), a word derived from the verb based on the Greek loanword, *parrēsia*. Jacob employs the word *pursāyā* to describe the act of “revealing” or “uncovering” herself before physicians. Related to the quadrilateral root ܦܪܣܝ meaning “to expose, shame, uncover,” the term appears in relation to biblical

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95 Giuseppe Scarpat, *Parrhesia greca, parrhesia cristiana* (Brescia: Paideia Editrice, 2001), 89-130. Scarpat also attends to the use of the word in Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and monastic literature, but he does not venture beyond Greek and Latin literature. For examples of how later ascetic Greek and Coptic writers employed this term see J. Drescher, “Graeco-Coptica II,” *Le Muséon* 83 (1970): 149-152. Two of the references Drescher includes are attributed to Ephrem Syrus: “Avoid familiarity with boys. Even to speak with women is excessive” (μετὰ μειρακίου μὴ κτήσῃ παρρησίαν μετὰ δὲ γυναῖκος περισσόν ἐστι λέγειν) and “Happy the man who has found favor in that hour and hears the words, Come you who are blessed of my Father” (μακάριος ἄνθρωπος ὁ ἑυρὼν παρρησίαν ἐν τῇ ὥρᾳ ἑκείνῃ καὶ ἀκούων τῆς φωνῆς· δεῦτε οἱ εὐλογημένοι); idem, “Graeco-Coptic Postscript,” *Le Muséon* 89 (1976): 319.
97 Butts, *Language Change in the Wake of Empire*, 121-122.
incidents of shameful bodily exposure and specifically female vulnerability.\(^{98}\) Within the Peshitta Judith uses this term as she recounts the rape of Dinah.\(^{99}\) While Narsai and Jacob do not use the Greek loanword *parrhēsia* in connection to female speech, their use of the noun *pursāyā* and attendant imagery show a more dynamic way that Greek shaped Syriac language.\(^{100}\)

### 5.7 Conclusion: A Virtuous Boldness

Late antique and early Byzantine poets found in scripture an inexhaustible treasury of words and images. For Syriac writers the words themselves were critical conveyors of revelation, and their writings contain continued meditation on the nature of biblical language. In his stanzaic poems (*mādrashē*) “On Faith,” Ephrem reflects on words as a medium for revelation: “He clothed himself in our language, so that he might clothe us in his mode of life.”\(^{101}\) Biblical language was simultaneously a stable and malleable resource for capturing the exemplarity of holy individuals. The evolution and semantic ranges of these words give us valuable insight into the gender and religious ideologies of the period.

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\(^{98}\) As we observed earlier, Ephrem uses this term within his prose commentary on Genesis to describe the exposure of Eve’s nudity. See R.M. Tonneau, *Sancti Ephraem Syri in Genesim et in Exodum Comentarii*. Corpus Scriptorum Christianorun Orientalium 152, Scriptores Syri 76 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1955), 38:19.

\(^{99}\) Jdt 9:2 “My Lord, God of my father Simeon, to whom you gave a sword in his hand to take vengeance on (his) enemies who unbound the hair of the virgin to defile [her], revealed her nakedness for disgrace, and defiled her womb for shame – for you said that it should not be so.” A similar usage is found in Ex 20:26: “You shall not go up by steps to my altar, so that your nakedness may not be exposed on it.”

\(^{100}\) So far, I have only found seven uses of Syriac *ܦܪܗܣܝܐ* in the corpus of Narsai. Six appear in his *mēmrā* on the Holy Mysteries, suggesting a strongly liturgical valence to the word.

\(^{101}\) On Faith 31.2. The Syriac and English translation may be found in *Ephrem the Syrian: Select Poems*, trans. Sebastian P. Brock and George A. Kiraz (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 18-19: ܐܫܡܗܠܒܫܕܝܠܢܕܢܠܒܫܢܕܝܠܗܒܕܘܒܪܐ܀
The literature of early Christians abounds with images of martyrs and ascetics—especially women—transgressing accepted norms to express their Christian faith in word and deed. Within this environment of holy fools and gender-bending ascetics, biblical women provided further fodder for the late antique imagination. Although the biblical text and poetic compositions mediated their “textual” presence within the Christian community, New Testament women were vividly real exemplars of ideal faith. These fallible figures existed as redeemable sinners for Syriac and Greek poets and as approachable models for Christians of all levels of religious commitment. Attending to the theme of boldness sheds light on how the shortcomings of biblical women were used to destabilize and relativize familiar formulations of piety. While historians cannot extrapolate from these dramatizations shifts in the normative behavior expected of real women, these portrayals of boldness provided a forum for societal reflection on the dangers and potentialities of female initiative. Biblical females such as the Canaanite woman became a canvas for depicting the emboldened mother as a metaphor for Christian confidence before God, an exemplar who challenged men and women alike to steel themselves in times of spiritual struggle.

Following in the footsteps of Ephrem, later Syriac poets preserved the complexities of female characters who transgressed social boundaries. For both Narsai and Jacob, the variety of terms employed for “boldness” was a flexible medium for fashioning Christian piety. The traditions of interpretation coalesced around particular characters who fell along a spectrum of impudence and faithful boldness. Eve, for example, was simultaneously imagined as the source of death and sin in the virulent diatribes of Narsai,
but was also imagined as the grieving mother. Ephrem often exercised great exegetical care to portray biblical women positively, justifying seemingly risqué actions by attending to motivations. The women before Solomon and Tamar provide further example of how the agency of women served a site for developing a Christian vocabulary for boldness among Syriac-speaking Christians. In contrast, Romanos did not extol boldness explicitly for his Constantinopolitan audiences. His fast-paced kontakia showed biblical characters – especially women – acting boldly, but he does not elaborate on the theme. Nevertheless, his varied use of received terms such as parrhēsia has gone unremarked in secondary literature. His poetry supplies valuable insights into the flexibility of the term among early Byzantine Christians and the legacies of earlier usages.

Through a constellation of terms for boldness our poets amplified the voices of women and highlighted their agency. Although authored by men, poetry - to use the words of Saba Mahmood - employs a reasoning that does not neatly “map onto the logic of repression and resistance.” Signaling the subtle dynamics of power, Greek and Syriac terms such as parrhēsia, ḥuṣpā, and mraḥ, were integral to the poetic constructions of female boldness in the works of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos. Through

102 Harvey, “Encountering Eve in the Syriac Liturgy,” 11-49. Within Jacob’s corpus there were also portraits of a grieving Eve. For an introduction and translation of a newly published poem attributed to Jacob on Eve see the present author’s article, “Mourning Eve: The Homily on Women as Attributed to Jacob of Serugh,” Patristica Nordica Annuaria 34 (2019): 31-59.
attending to the subtle shifts of vocabulary and rhetoric, these representations of women offer us more insights into the dynamics of male authorship and female agency.

These poems participate in a larger conversation about the role of eagerness and zeal in animating the Christian life. Romanos’s various uses of *parrhēsia* invoke several facets of the word’s traditional semantic range. Writing in Greek, Romanos applies this richly laden term to serve his rhetorical aims and ties his language closely to the biblical text. Both Narsai and Jacob, following the example of Ephrem, use vocabulary informed by biblical usage, but through juxtaposition and nimble intertextual allusions, they became versifying alchemists: what appears perverse becomes the means of sanctifying grace. Marrying philological analysis with the questions of a gender historian illuminates the ways gender and language actively constructed one another, as writers cultivated the signifying potential of language to express emerging religious ideals.

6.1 Introduction

Poetry has been an understudied body of Christian literature, but hymnography and poetry provide valuable resources for understanding the diversity of Christian interpretative methods.\(^1\) In contrast to commentaries and expository sermons, poetry offers a *performative* mode of interpretation.\(^2\) Through telling the stories of characters, poets construct images of holiness and spiritual striving, making biblical texts “speak” to their contemporary audiences.

The poetry of eastern Christians unites poetic form with rhetorical techniques to create distinct forms of verse interpretation through biblical storytelling rather than offering explications of individual verses characteristic of commentaries.\(^3\) While previous scholarship framed the relationship of the Greek *kontakion* and the Syriac poetic forms in terms of dependence and influence, the comparative readings of previous chapters raise a different set of questions.\(^4\) How do poets present biblical narratives for their audiences?

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2 The line between homilies and poetry is somewhat more tenuous. An alternative binary could be drawn between “pure” and “applied” exegesis, in which case poetry would appear to offer clearer directives for living morally. For the drawbacks of this distinction for Antiochene authors, see Lucas Van Rompay, “Antiochene Biblical Interpretation: Greek and Syriac,” in *The Book of Genesis in Jewish and Oriental Christian Interpretation*, ed. Judith Frishman and Lucas Van Rompay (Louvain: Peeters, 1997), 108n18.


4 See my discussion in Chapter One.
What are the strategies of biblical storytellers for encouraging their listeners to emulate the biblical models present in these poems? These are not questions demanding a single answer, but they lead to a further question: What difference does poetry make in relating the events of the Gospel? Previously I have discussed the ways that poets inhabited the voices and perspectives of female characters; in what follows I demonstrate how poets used dramatic conventions and rhetoric to allow their listeners to inhabit these stories as well.

Focusing on poetry about the unnamed women of the New Testament, this chapter queries the implications of these works for mapping the dynamics of biblical interpretation and genres of poetry. Without strict adherence to the wording of the biblical text, Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos preserve narrative unity and exercise restraint when making biblical allusions and drawing typologies. We have seen the frequency with which they employ imagined speech and corporeal imagery to deepen characterization. Through such techniques, poets and audiences explored the inner recesses of Gospel narratives by attending to the embodied experiences of biblical characters and, in the case of poetry about unnamed New Testament women, by accentuating the affective qualities of the relationship between Jesus and the protagonist. Despite the marked differences between the kontakion and the mēmrā as poetic forms, composers shared common strategies of biblical interpretation as they underscored the humanity of Jesus and the affective pedagogy which leads humanity toward the divine.

Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos develop biblical language and imagery and embed these revelatory encounters in the immediacy of the verbal and physical intimacy the
unnamed women share with Jesus. The poetic interpretations of these particular Gospel narratives converge around a coherent set of foci: attention to Jesus’s body and earthly ministry, the diffusion of mutual desire among divine and human characters, and the ways poets encourage listeners’ identification with and participation in the unfolding biblical drama. The insights explored here extend beyond this immediate set of texts, but they also provide avenues for mapping the relationship of poetic storytelling to the interpretative principles of figures such as Theodore of Mopsuestia and John Chrysostom. Bringing together the themes of the body and voice first explored in earlier chapters, this final study examines how the interpretative postures of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos reinforce their artistic skills for rendering female holiness and heroism in verse.

6.2 The Body and Earthly Ministry of Christ

For Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos, the Incarnation and its role in the history of salvation is a unifying theme. As they relate stories of encounter from Jesus’s ministry, the poets present these interactions with women as revealing the depth of divine love for humanity. Poetry also brings the human body of Christ into sharp distinction from other bodies. While we have principally examined the ways poets characterize female protagonists within these works, it is vital to maintain a connection between those portraits of women and the depictions of Christ which unfolds throughout their individual poetic corpora.

The clearest examples of this may be found in the poetry of Narsai, who emphasizes the centrality of Christ’s humanity throughout his poetry. This feature of Narsai’s compositions demonstrates that interpretative method and theological emphases
are intrinsically intertwined for these authors. I draw my example from Narsai’s *mēmrā* 5, “On Mary,” a work beyond the immediate scope of this study, but illustrative of his approach to the biblical text and the style of his poetry.

His the hunger, his the thirst, and his the sleep, and He grew tired and sat down and asked for water that he might quench his thirst. His is the visible body that received pains; his is the soul that bore the weight of discernment. His the trepidation, his the fear, and his the prayer; and He was strengthened by the Spiritual One so that He would not weaken. He was in the upper room, He was at the court, and He was at Golgotha; and it is He who received dirty spittle from the mouth of the dirty ones.⁵

As a whole, this *mēmrā* deals extensively with correcting the erroneous Christological formulations of Narsai’s opponents. Within these verses the theological vision of Narsai comes into focus as he triumphantly expounds the centrality of Christ’s embodied existence to the work of redemption. As Narsai raises his voice to underscore the role Jesus’s human existence and lowliness play in the work of salvation, the broader theological setting of Narsai’s thought comes into view. The writings of Theodore of

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Mopsuestia played a formative role in Narsai’s training as a theologian and reader of Scripture. Although the translation of Theodore’s writings forms a pivotal moment within the development of Syriac Christianity, there had long existed deeper affinities and “a long and fruitful coexistence” between the interpretative methods fostered in Antioch and Edessa.⁶

Throughout these verses, Narsai assumes the role of a pedagogue directing our attention to the conceptual pattern: the facets of Jesus’s earthly embodiment are not incidental or inconsequential. The repetition of the possessive “his” (ܐܚܝܐ) imbues the verses with a steady drumbeat rhythm, maintaining our focus on the fullness of Jesus’s humanity. Here we see the work of intertextual references compounding Narsai’s Christological teaching that Jesus’s embodied presence was central to his work. In the second line he even references the thirst of Jesus at the well of the Samaritan woman (Jn 4:7). The lowliness of the human experience exerts a gravitational pull on the larger biblical context of individual narratives as Narsai underscores his points by placing these biblical references together.

The opening verses of Narsai’s mēmrā “On the Canaanite Woman” are critically important for establishing the key themes that he unfolds over the course of the poem. Within his mēmrā on the Canaanite woman, Narsai calls attention to another significant facet of the Incarnation that these initial verses underscore: the revelatory nature of

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Jesus’s body. Narsai uses the epistolary imagery to link Incarnated flesh to verbal expression:

On the pages of his body He wrote down (the expression of) his loving will, so that bodily beings would see what is hidden through that which is revealed. Along with visible limbs, his will set off and came to them to teach them how to return to him. He composed a (human) body in writing as (one would) a letter, and the power of his hiddenness signed it and sealed it with his name.\(^7\)

Within these verses Narsai further refines his description of Jesus’s flesh to include the pedagogical strategies playing out through the Incarnation, a feature that ties Narsai’s verses to other patristic authors such as Athanasius as well as to Antiochene authors more broadly. As Narsai describes the body of the Incarnation rendering the divine will perceptible to bodily beings, we are reminded of divine condescension to human weakness. These examples from “On Mary” and “On the Canaanite Woman” demonstrate the different means Narsai employs to underscore Christ’s humanity.

As an interpretative frame for the story of the Canaanite woman, Narsai’s epistolary imagery for the Incarnate body raises questions. Narsai does not explain his reasoning explicitly, but the presence of this passage among his introductory versesforegrounds the body of the Incarnation. Shifting to Romanos’s *kontakion* on the

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\(^7\) Narsai, Mēmrā 32 “On the Canaanite Woman,” D70 f. 205r. Cf. 2 Cor 3:1-3.
By whom was this done? You, my friends, should know.
I just disclosed the plot, and now I reveal who stole
the power, in what way and how it was done. Voicelessly she came and called to me
and grasped my robe as a letter;
she acquired healing for herself as she cried to me:
'Savior, save me!'

Throughout Romanos’s kontakion Jesus appears in complete control of unfolding events.

Here he enlightens the disciples, unveiling the sequence of events as a master of
ceremonies directing all that unfolds. These verses also contain evidence for the
expressive body of the woman herself as she is described within a single line as moving
voicelessly (ἀφωνίᾳ) while simultaneously crying out (βοῶσα). Through the imagery of
speech, gestures, and mouths, the body possesses expansive potential for verbal
expression both heard and silently understood. Jesus characterizes his encounter with the
ailing woman as part of an elaborate plot (δραματούργημα). Within a few strophes Jesus

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8 A freer translation might be: “I shall reveal how the one who stole did so with a ruse.” See also Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 315n15.
9 Romanos, Hymn XII.14 (XXIII.14).
will address himself to the woman as well, proclaiming his willing participation in her theft.¹⁰

The imagery of the Hemorrhaging woman’s narrative, specifically the detail that she grasps the hem of his garment, sets the conditions for Christ’s presence. Whereas Narsai emphasized the humanity and corporeal suffering of Jesus, the robe becomes an extension of Christ’s divinity within Romanos. Both Romanos and Jacob posit a dichotomy between the quality of the woman’s faithful touch and the crowds who press upon Jesus. As Romanos’s Jesus rebukes Simon Peter, he explains the differences between the crowd and the woman without reference to his own body: “(The crowds) do not touch my divinity; while she, who touched a visible robe, clearly grasped my divine nature.”¹¹ In the prior strophe Jesus had described his robe as a letter, and now he further defines the robe as a visible marker of his divinity. The robe possesses the qualities of Jesus’s embodied presence.

Holding onto the textual robe, we can follow how this imagery unfolds in another poetic rendering of the Hemorrhaging woman’s story. Turning to Jacob, we find an extended meditation on the imagery of touch and healing as he circles back to the theme several times. Towards the end of the mēmrā, Jacob moves from the narrative confines of the New Testament account to apply the woman’s example to all of creation. Here the body of Christ as the agent of restoration comes into focus:

¹⁰ Romanos, Hymn XII.19 (XXIII.19).
¹¹ Romanos, Hymn XII.15 (XXIII.15): Οὐ ψαύουσί μου τῆς θεότητος· αὕτη, ψαύσασα δὲ στολῆς ὑπομένης,θείας φύσεως σαφῶς ἔδραξε.
By the edge of the garment she grasped her fount ceased; just as when creation lays ahold of the body its iniquity vanishes. For this reason, he gave the triumph to faith So that everyone might approach the body through faith. He depicted Creation for its iniquity in the woman of blood when he healed her; that one he purified, and for the other one he gave pardon through his hidden power.  

For Jacob, the woman’s experience of healing performs in microcosm what the entire created order experiences in relationship to the body of the incarnation. Just as Romanos had emphasized the woman’s faith as conditioning her touch, Jacob reminds us that faith transforms the quality of the woman’s touch.

6.3 The Hermeneutic of Desire

6.3.1 Drawn Together through Desire: New Testament Women in Concert

Among the many features of Ephrem’s verse exegesis is the profusion of intertextual references. Rather than sustained treatments of biblical stories, Ephrem assembles mosaics of biblical allusions and images. The “jeweled style” of Ephrem’s poetry evokes Michael Roberts’s description of Latin poetry in Late Antiquity: “The

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12 The Syriac text may be found in Homilies of Mar Jacob of Serug, ed. by Paul Bedjan and Sebastian Brock (Paris – Leipzig. 1905. 2nd ed. Piscataway, NJ, 2006), V.525-551. I have consulted the fine translation published in Jacob of Sarug, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, trans. Susan Ashbrook Harvey, Sebastian P. Brock, Reyhan Durnaz, Rebecca Stephens Falcasanto, Michael Payne, and Daniel Picus (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2016), 178-233. I will provide the page number of the translation as well for further reference, but I have frequently made changes. Jacob, Homily 170 “On the Afflicted Woman,” II.549-550.524-529; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on Women Whom Jesus Met, 230.
brilliance of an expression is derived from its setting, from the relationships of equivalence or opposition it bears to its fellows, from the play of variation and concinnity that invests it with a multifaceted, jewel-like quality.”\(^{13}\) As one shifts from the poetry of Ephrem to works of his fifth- and sixth-century descendants, there is a noticeable turn towards a more restrained use of biblical allusions. While the predilection for the form of the \textit{mēmrā} partly accounts for this change within Syriac poets, both Romanos and his Syriac-speaking counterparts attend more assiduously to the quiddity of the biblical character’s transformation. The integrity of the sequence of the events first related in the biblical text allows the poetic narrative to represent chronological time smoothly without interruption. References to other biblical characters and the larger framework of Scripture allow additional stories and chronologies to be integrated, but the instances of these references are not overwhelming. Indeed their very infrequency underscores the thematic relevance of the choice allusions as biblical stories are drawn into mutually illuminative relationship.

Within Romanos’s \textit{kontakion} on the Sinful woman, we see references to the Canaanite woman blended in seamlessly around the theme of desire for the divine. Echoing the techniques of Ephrem, one observes the kaleidoscopic use of biblical imagery as he brings the two women’s stories into mutually illuminative conversation:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ὑπέπνευσεν ἡ ὀσμὴ τῆς τραπέζης τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πρώην μὲν ἄσωτον, νυνὶ δὲ καρτερικήν, τὴν ἐν ἄρχῃ κύνα καὶ ἐν τῷ τέλει ἀμνάδα,}
\end{quote}

The scent of Christ’s table excited
the woman who was once debauched but is now steadfast,
in the beginning, a dog but in the end a lamb,
slave and daughter, harlot and chaste
and so in greedy pursuit she arrives at the table
and forsaking the crumbs underneath, she took up the bread.

Hungrier than the Canaanite woman before,
she fed her empty soul, for she so believed;
she was not released by a shout but rather saved in silence,
for she said in tears: “Lord, raise me up from
the filth of my deeds.”

Here Romanos layers titles for biblical women alongside the domestic imagery of tables
and food to capture the frenzyed desire of the Sinful woman for Christ. The allusions here
compel the listener to recall other biblical stories, but the references are selective and
richly evocative. This style of verse exegesis may be best described as synaesthetic, not
only depicting images for the mind’s eye, but arousing a full sensory experience replete
with scent, tears, and touch. Here the Sinful woman goes beyond the example of the

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14 Cf. Mt 15:26; Mk 7:27.  
15 The imagery of Mt 15:21-28 Mk 7:24-29 features prominently within this strophe.  
16 Cf. Mt 15:21-28. Carpenter balks at the disruption of the narrative sequence, suggesting the πάλαι may
refer to a more ancient incident such as 1 Kgs 17:17-24 when Elijah raises the son of the woman of Zarepath (102, no. 5).  
17 Romanos Hymn X.3 (XXI.3).  
18 Mary Carruthers, The Craft of Thought: Meditation, rhetoric, and the making of images, 400 -1200
(Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 148. While Carruthers applies this term to the
panoply of images within the poetry of Prudentius, the pedagogical and mnemonic function of the images is
Canaanite woman as she takes up the “bread” rather than the crumbs, clearly a eucharistic image since the body of Christ is the recipient of the woman’s attention.

6.3.2 The Desiring Body

Without erasing the distinctions between the two women, Romanos reflects on the sublimated desires that each woman embodies. Poetic exegesis likewise attends to the female body, its movement and condition, for the sake of amplifying the dramatic tension as well as conveying its theological message. Through attending to physical beauty, deformity, and physical condition, poets employ the signifying power of the body to attain their rhetorical and exegetical ends. As Sister Benedicta Ward has demonstrated, the redeemed harlot is a powerful symbol for the human condition and the need for repentance, recalling biblical imagery for Israel’s infidelity toward God.¹⁹ The proliferation of such a symbol, Romanos demonstrates, harbors suspicions about female sexuality.²⁰ Nevertheless, the dynamic of desire and physical hunger within the poem illustrates the transformation of the female protagonist. The Canaanite woman and Sinful woman – like the listeners themselves – follow their desires in pursuit of the Incarnated deity.

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fruitful for thinking about the ways that Romanos and the other poets employ (albeit occasionally) intertextual references.
As Jacob speaks of the Sinful woman’s encounter with Christ, he returns repeatedly to the imagery of healing to describe the body of the penitent. The body renders visible the suffering of the soul, but its healing also materializes the expression of Jesus’s boundless love for humanity. As Jacob exhorts his listeners to rely on the mercy of the divine, he underscores the benevolence of the divine:

Beloved is the body whenever it is afflicted with wounds;
The eye is stirred so that it also weeps for the beloved
The Merciful One seeks for love to be offered him,
but he does not take a gift from anyone when He heals him.
He races to a good will to love it,
for (the good will) takes the place of sacrifices and of libations.
But it was not to judge the world that he came when he was sent;
he planned to bring life to the world because he was full of mercy.
With sinners and harlots he conversed,
For a doctor is useful for these ones who might bandage them.\(^{21}\)

The imagery of healing and medicine shapes Jacob’s presentation of the Sinful woman as the metaphor provides a handle on divine realities. As he retells the events of the

encounter, relying principally on the Gospel of Luke, he reminds the listener of the perfume while simultaneously denying that it was necessary. It is the woman’s disposition, Jacob, claims, that roused the mercy of Christ.

As poets stage the dramatic events of these biblical stories, the body amplifies the expressive power of the female voice. In the case of some characters, bodily gestures supplant the voice. Images of women communicating their desire for Christ through speech and act underscore the relationality of these encounters. We have seen this with the outstretched hand of the Hemorrhaging woman in Romanos: she kept silent in her voice, yet with her hand she cried to you fervently.” 22 As the Sinful woman dotes upon and cares for the body of Jesus, she proclaims that the Savior prefers these silent actions as expressive of a contrite heart and a sincere change of heart. 23

While Narsai emphasizes the dramatic speech of the Canaanite woman, his interpretation of the biblical text involves a careful meditation on her inner deliberations. His description of her embodied speech and cognition emphasizes the psychosomatic unity at the heart of his theological anthropology:

22 Romanos XII.2 (XXIII.2-5): σιγῶσα φωνῇ, τῇ παλάμῃ δὲ κράζουσά σοι ἐκτενῶς.
23 Romanos X.5 (XXI.5).
In faith her limbs geared up in pursuit of her inclination, and her senses and her emotions raised their voice to beg for mercies. Mouth and mind alike called out with a humble voice, and they seized the audacity of invincible faith. As a trumpet the mind called out through the outer senses, and the mouth expressed the pain of her inner sufferings. An advocate became (her) mouth for (her) emotions before the court, and the mute ones on behalf of those endowed with speech gave forth plaintive sounds.24

This vivid description of the Canaanite woman summons a full range of senses, and Narsai leads his listener through an inspection of this woman’s emotional and physical stance as she readies herself for spiritual combat. Narsai’s verses render the invisible movement of the woman’s soul visible for the inspection of his audience. Her body expresses her preparedness, but Narsai underscores the central senses and body parts through atomization. It is her mouth which becomes the “advocate,” speaking for her emotions and suffering. In the words of Ruth Webb, such vivid imagery reminds us that “the word does far more than convey information about an entity; in addition – above all perhaps – it creates an experience of perceiving that entity and, what is more, the listener, like a member of a theater audience, participates in the production of the effect.”25 These select instances show the palpable nature of desire and longing within this poetry as the women direct their care and attention to the embodied presence of Jesus.

6.4 Speaking of Ourselves: The Poetic Narrator

The poet’s persona has been mentioned throughout these chapters as an authoritative presence. This presence can take on different forms, and the visibility of the narrator varies throughout the authors under examination here. While Narsai’s Canaanite woman refers to herself in the first person singular frequently, the poet assumes the position of an omniscient narrating presence, maintaining a pedagogical authority while disclosing very little of himself. Jacob alludes to a personal relationship with the Hemorrhaging woman, claiming that the female protagonist has urged him to tell her story. As a result, Jacob emphasizes the role of the poet as a type of intermediary between the listener and the biblical text. While we have already examined Romanos’s *kontakion* on the Hemorrhaging woman as an example of the penitent self, a passage from his work on the Sinful woman provides an informative example of how he uses direct address to bring the listener and the biblical text into conversation:

οὔτε λογίζομαι τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ εὐσπλαγχνίαν, πῶς περιήλθε ζητῶν με τὸν γνώμη πλανώμενον·
δ’ έμε γὰρ πάντα τόπον ἔξερενα, δ’ έμε καὶ Φαρισαίῳ συναριστά ὁ τρέφων πάντας,
καὶ δείκνυσι τὴν τράπεζαν θυσιαστήριον·
ἐν ταύτῃ ἀνακείμενος καὶ χαριζόμενος τὴν ὀφειλὴν τοῖς χρεώσταις, ἵνα θαρρῶν πᾶς χρεώστης
προσέλθῃ λέγων: “Κύριε, λύτρωσαι με τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.”

Nor do I consider the benevolence of Christ,
How he went about looking for me when I had knowingly gone astray.²⁶
For me he searches everywhere,

²⁶ Cf. Mt 18:12.
For me the nourisher of all also dines with a Pharisee,\textsuperscript{27}  
And he shows the table to be an altar;  
There he reclines and forgives  
The debtors what they owe, so every debtor may boldly (\textit{θαρρῶν})\textsuperscript{28}  
approach and say, “Lord, release me from 
\textit{the filth of my deeds}.”\textsuperscript{29}

Earlier we examined a passage where Romanos links the Canaanite woman to the Sinful 
woman, playfully replacing referents and re-applying biblical images to weave their 
examples together. Within this passage, Romanos joins the Sinful woman as a penitent, a 
debtor, invoking the parable Jesus gives (Lk 7:36-50) without elaborating upon it. Not 
only does the insertion of the first-person provide evidence for the dramatic rhetoric of a 
penitent self, but it also highlights the mutuality of desire. For our poets, Christ’s love for 
humanity is foundational for understanding his actions towards these women and towards 
all.\textsuperscript{30}

Through their poetic re-narrations of this pericope, Jacob of Serugh and Romanos 
Melodos develop a poetic of divine encounter that foregrounds issues of spiritual 
receptivity and epistemology. The homilies of John Chrysostom, while pursuing similar 
interpretative ends, supply a prose comparison to highlight the distinctive orientation to

\textsuperscript{27} Lk 7:36-50; Lk 11:37.  
\textsuperscript{28} Lk 7:41-43.  
\textsuperscript{29} Romanos, Hymn X.2 (XXI.2).  
Doerfler, Kyle Smith, and Emanuel Fiano (Leuven: Peeters, 2015), 51-63.
the biblical text and treatment of the female protagonist within the examples of verse exegesis.

Within each of these texts a cultivated authorial persona emerges periodically, fashioning the triangulated relationship between speaker, listener, and Scripture. For a preacher such as John Chrysostom, the biblical text exists as an object for analysis, and his sermon serves as a performed commentary, aiding and guiding the listener through a predominantly moral reading. As Chrysostom mounts intertextual linkages and interrogates the narrative details, he invokes the biblical authors and beseeches his audience to imitate them.\(^{31}\) The listener (or reader) is ever aware that the biblical narrative is a composed and purposefully designed record of divine revelation.

In contrast, the framing of Jacob’s mēmrā and Romanos’s kontakion on the Samaritan Woman foreground the divine aid the poet seeks for exploring the biblical text, but the authors move fluidly between moments of self-fashioning and commenting upon the biblical text. The seams between authorial self-presentation, re-narration of the pericope, and moral reflection are less evident and unfold gradually through following a set of images and biblically inspired linkages. As the narrative action unfolds around the well outside the woman’s village of Sichar, it is no surprise that water imagery abounds within these texts. Even Chrysostom begins his first homily about the narrative with a catalogue of biblical witnesses for water as a channel for the work of the Holy Spirit.\(^{32}\)

\(^{31}\) John Chrysostom, PG XXXIII.23.
\(^{32}\) John Chrysostom, PG XXXII.1.
For Jacob and Romanos, their authorial self-presentation within these particular poems introduces the reader to the biblical themes they are about to explore through the imagery of water. After an introductory prayer for divine aid that his soul may be profitable to God, Jacob asks for divine inspiration: “O, Lord of the Seas, who asked for water from a destitute woman, be for me the spring that flows with life as You promised.”\(^{33}\) Within his opening lines Jacob posits a dynamic that will run throughout his reading: the paradox of divine kenosis and abundance. Each narrative detail about Jesus’s experience of human frailty and need is an invitation to meditate on divine abundance. Humanity, in these lines of Jacob instantiated in the person of the poet, experiences fullness only as a conduit for divine gift. Romanos makes such an economy of gift and re-gift explicit as he exhorts his listener to emulate the generosity of the Samaritan Woman: “You were not worthy of having what you possess and what you keep through the grace of the giver. Do not hesitate, then to distribute to those who ask, just as the woman of Samaria once shared.”\(^{34}\) Immediately the hearer, poet, and biblical figure are bound in a mimetic relationship.

For all our authors these narrative features point to the unfolding of a divine plan which aims at bringing the individual into communion with the God. Chrysostom reads the interaction with the Samaritan Woman as an example of Jesus’s pedagogical strategy, coaxing the woman to ascend from material concerns for water and cultic practice to seek divine wisdom. Extending such reasoning, Jacob places equal stress on Jesus’s


\(^{34}\) Romanos, Hymn IX.2 (XIX.2).
condescension. In his thirst and request for water, Jesus ventures into the world of quotidian affairs to seek out this woman: “By the pretext of that ordinary water which He sought from her, He taught her that He had another water to give.” The Woman’s responses to Jesus, specifically her confession of John 4:25 “I know, my Lord, that the Messiah is coming and He will teach us,” reveal her love and receptivity. Our Syriac author theorizes the divine encounter through a language of love and mutual desire. As Jacob notes “[Jesus] saw that the Woman was inflamed with fervent love for Him, and He no longer concealed Himself from her.” Like Chrysostom, Jacob recognizes the singularity of the Samaritan Woman’s experience of revelation unmediated by signs, but his depiction renders this instance of unmediated revelation with erotic overtones. Whereas Chrysostom juxtaposes her willingness to accept Christ’s self-revelation with the recalcitrance of the Jews and figures like Nicodemus, Jacob depicts her spiritual simplicity and receptivity, a gendered trait for all these authors, as a sign of her inner affective disposition.

Moving beyond the grammatical meaning of the text, Jacob understands Jesus’s actions as approximating a marital bond, “that Woman of many husbands You betrothed so that she might become Yours; betroth to Yourself the soul, that it should never know anyone but You.” Compressed within these two lines Jacob acknowledges the case of

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35 Jacob, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.288.159-160; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on the Women Whom Jesus Met, 74.
36 Jacob, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.299.379-380; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on the Women Whom Jesus Met, 96.
37 Jacob, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.281.19-20; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on the Women Whom Jesus Met, 58.
the Samaritan Woman while positing the spiritual ideal for the faithful soul to pursue. It is a marital bond that can simultaneously be marked by fidelity to the singular divine spouse while being enjoyed by all human souls. Further on in the poem Jesus assumes the part of a jealous lover, fearful to disappoint the beloved’s expectations:

He saw that if He turned away and did not reveal that He was the Messiah, She would seek out another messiah and there would be harm. He saw that love was hastening swiftly after Him, And He delivered Himself lest [love] be worn out; then He captured her.  

Within this passage as well as others, the mutuality of longing exists in tension with Christ’s ultimate control. Throughout his re-telling, Jacob underscores the woman’s remarkable powers of discernment, and affective and erotic language heightens the unfolding drama.

6.5 Integrating Syriac Poetry into the Historiography of Late Antique Poetry: Comparison of Verse Interpretation

Studies of Latin biblical epics have emphasized the pedagogical aspects of these works, underscoring the effects of Christian poets to press classical culture into service for the needs of an increasingly Christian Roman Empire. In his foundational study, Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike, Reinhart Herzog emphasizes the readers’ expectations that biblical poetry provide “first of all access to the sacred text” along with unquestionable orthodoxy, underscoring the edificatory function of poetry in the Latin

38 Jacob, Homily 46 “On the Samaritan Woman,” 2.299.389-392; idem, Jacob of Sarug’s Homilies on the Women Whom Jesus Met, 96.
west.\textsuperscript{40} Establishing Latin biblical epics within the rhetorical tradition of the paraphrase, Michael Roberts further emphasizes continuity with the classical world.\textsuperscript{41} Within the Latin and Greek world, the practice of poetry was embedded in classical traditions and forms. The writings of patristic authors frequently reflect ongoing tensions concerning the relationship of Christians to pagan literature. Within overviews of late Latin literature in particular, scholars acknowledge a tension between continuity with and repudiation of classical culture: “Late antique poetics, in other words, possessed a very particular and distinctive set of responses to the burdens and anxieties of antique influence.”\textsuperscript{42} While this statement certainly rings true for Latin poetry, and perhaps to differing degrees Greek poetry, it does not account for the witness of Syriac literature.

As Syriac poetry blossomed in the fourth through sixth centuries, the larger Christian world witnessed an increasing skepticism towards poetry as a medium for theology and biblical interpretation. This decline narrative has dominated scholarship on late Latin poetry, but a synchronic view of the period allows historians to better map the contours of Christian responses to poetry and the place of poetry within Christian

\footnotesize
\textsuperscript{40} Reinhart Herzog, \textit{Die Bibelepik der lateinischen Spätantike} (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1975), 40.
\textsuperscript{41} Michael Roberts, \textit{Biblical Epic and Rhetorical Paraphrase in Late Antiquity} (Liverpool: Francis Cairns, 1985).
literature. The story of late ancient poetry has so often been told through the texts of Latin and Greek writers that the alternative approach of Syriac Christianity to verse has been marginalized. By the end of Late Antiquity Christian writers in the eastern Mediterranean were creating a new outlet for biblical interpretation in verse beyond the forms of the paraphrase and biblical epic so common in the Latin-speaking west. The poets of the fifth and sixth century developed an incarnational poetic through harnessing the potential of verse to relate stories of personal transformation.

6.6 Conclusion: Why Poetry?

Taking a more synchronic view of late antique literature, this blossoming of poetic activity in the eastern Roman and Persian empires complements the “resurgence” of poetry in Greek and Latin.43 While Syriac poetry has been excluded or featured as an addendum to larger narratives about late antique literature, greater dialogue between scholars of poetry across linguistically-defined boundaries promises to advance our understanding of verse exegesis and the role of poets in the reception history of biblical texts. Rather than a broad study of verse exegesis or the formal characteristics of the mēmrā and kontakion, in this chapter I have approached the question of what difference poetic narration holds for the reception history of these specific texts. I contend that in telling the stories of human and divine encounter, Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos engage

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and “encode” concepts of revelation within forms of language and rhetoric that indicate deeper Christian truths.  

Through entertaining paradoxes, layering allusions, and playing with the suggestive possibilities of language, these authors resisted narrative closure and underscored the mutuality of desire.  

In this way poetry is not simply a re-telling of biblical stories, it is a form of interpretation imbued with theological reflection: specifically, a theology of divine condescension and human striving.

The writings of Narsai, Jacob, and Romanos reflect an imaginative engagement with biblical literature through adaptation and expansion of narratives, and as a result their poems stand as independent literary productions. 

Distinct from commentaries, these works delve into scriptural texts to uncover their “inner dimensions,” often in order to produce a pedagogical and edificatory effect on the listener. 

The authors under examination here display an acute sensitivity to the capacity of language to meet the conceptual challenges of expressing theological discourse.


45 Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Women in Early Byzantine Hagiography: Reversing the Story,” in That Gentle Strength: Historical Perspectives on Women in Christianity, eds. Lynda L. Coon, Katherine J. Haldane, and Elisabeth W. Sommer (Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia, 1990), 45. Here I am inspired by Susan Ashbrook Harvey’s statements regarding hagiography as “more than a social document about its culture. It is a form of theology, and it presents a theology of activity.”


May love also stir the preacher to speak about you,
And may it awaken the listener again to your teaching.
Take love for yourself, O listener, and come, enjoy
The teaching which is full of blessings for the one who loves it.  

7.1 Outcome of this Study

Ongoing reflection on and interpretation of authoritative scriptures runs as a common thread throughout diverse Christian traditions. Inherited forms and aesthetic conventions converge with the rhetorical aims of Christian poets composing in diverse locations and languages. For ancient audiences, the conventions of genre and performance shaped the way they experienced poetry recited and sung. Over the course

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2 For the influence of rhetorical forms on dramatic self-presentation in Latin literature, see William Batstone, “The Drama of Rhetoric at Rome,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rhetoric*, ed. Erik Gunderson (New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 212-227. Batstone’s description of the dynamic between audiences and orators is instructive for listeners and poets as well since he claims that there was a “special relationship that the Romans felt between words and power: you are within my sphere of influence and even control if you accept my (rhetorical) version of the world” (215). When comparing biblical interpretation of homilies and poetry, for example, it is essential to remember the authority of the speaker. Instead of configuring the power differential between preachers and poets as one of higher or lesser degree, it is more fruitful to examine how each speaker performs his authority and power differently as well as the freedom he exercises with the biblical text.
of previous chapters, we have explored the poetry of Syriac and Greek writers who contributed to the larger Christian literary landscape of Late Antiquity, a period when Latin- and Greek-speaking Christians across the Mediterranean were reckoning with the legacy of classical literature and cultural memory. Syriac Christianity offers a different story: poetry was embraced as the proper medium for theological reflection as well as a prime vehicle for crafting compelling and illuminating readings of biblical texts.

The poetry of Narsai, Jacob of Serugh, and Romanos Melodos has served as the focal point for this research, and they represent three distinct voices and artistic profiles. These three writers were situated in the multi-lingual environment of the eastern Mediterranean, and their interpretative styles and methods of biblical interpretation reflect multiple directions of influence. Through placing two Syriac poets into conversation with a Greek hymnographer, this study offers a sustained treatment of the dynamic literary landscape of Late Antiquity and stands as the first comparative study of

3 Alan Cameron, Wandering Poets and Other Essays on Late Greek Literature and Philosophy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). Cameron presents Late Antiquity as a time of “comeback” for classicizing forms, especially in mythological poetry. Discussing the lack of interest in Late Antique poetry, Cameron laments that pagan and Christian poets are far too often treated in isolation from one another. Scholars of Latin poetry have pressed questions of cultural authority and the position of poetry frequently. Latin authors such as Augustine expressed a suspicion of classical learning and poetry that has prompted scholars such as Reinhart Herzog to emphasize the demotion of poetic genres and the importance of edification from works of verse (“Exegese – Erbauung – delectatio: Beiträge zu einer christlichen Poetik der Spätantike,” in Spätantike, Studien zur römischen und lateinisch-christlichen Literatur, ed. P. Habermehl (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2002), 52-67.

this scale. Comparison of their poetic compositions has shed light on how each writer creatively engaged received traditions and literary forms.

Given the sizeable literary corpus of each writer, I decided early on to focus my research on the poetic narrations of the encounters between four unnamed women and Jesus. Individually, the Canaanite woman, the Sinful woman, the Hemorrhaging woman, and the Samaritan woman each provide a rich reception history. Previously published studies of the reception of these figures have largely ignored poetry after Ephrem, leaving new ground to be explored. Jacob is the only writer who offers a sustained individual treatment of all four women over the course of his writings, but these women singularly or in tandem appear at a few points in the poetry of Romanos as well. While this study has focused on a critical period in Christian intellectual and literary history, these chapters also contain threads of a larger reception history for the stories of these particular women. Placing female boldness and self-assertion as central to understanding the interpretative dynamics at play in these poems, I have found that the stories of unnamed New Testament women form a critical site for the construction of gender and sexuality within early Christian studies.

Throughout the course of this research common themes among these biblical narratives have emerged frequently. The first three chapters pursued prominent themes within these poetic compositions: the body, “ethnicity,” and voices of women. Each chapter represents an independent study of one aspect of this poetic literature performed in the classroom and school. By privileging the theme of the poetic body, I examined how Romanos and Narsai apply purity discourses to the “textual body” of the
Hemorrhaging woman. Whereas Romanos vacillates between acknowledging the ailing female body and rendering her corporeal state a symbol for the sinner, Jacob’s poem underscores that the woman’s agency and independence to operate in the public square, eventually rendering her a sympathetic figure as she reveals to the audience the extent of her physical suffering.

The third chapter attends to terms for ethnicity within these works. Building on recent trends in the study of “ethnic reasoning” among early Christian authors, I query the ways our three poets deploy markers of difference as they craft the Samaritan woman and the Canaanite woman into figures for the church “from the nations.” While each poet dwells on the significance of the ethno-religious markers attributed to these women by New Testament authors, two very different readings arise. Narsai’s elaborate framing of the Canaanite woman as an enslaved descendant of Ham intensifies her status as a marginalized woman, stoking the pathos of the listener and extending her story beyond the biblical narrative. Both Romanos and Jacob render the ethnic marker a cipher for speaking about the church as an aggregate of the nations. The final thematic chapter examines how the poets employ the dramatic speech of New Testament women to vivify their portrayals for audiences.

Turning to language in the fifth chapter, I pursue a feminist philological study of the terms for boldness, arguing that Syriac poets developed a constellation of terms for describing feminine audacity. As part of this work I provided an overview of Romanos’s varied use of the term parrhēsia, a heretofore unexamined instance of the term. My final chapter offers some brief observations about the implications of this poetry for
understanding the interpretative procedure of these three authors. Returning to the themes of the body and the voice, I demonstrate that the poets who interpreted the narratives of New Testament women engage in a rigorous form of interpretation that deepens characterization through vivid imagery and added speech. In sum, I offer a varied study of the Nachleben of unnamed New Testament women in the eastern Mediterranean. As unnamed New Testament women act and speak, they join female martyrs and ascetics whose transgressive actions defy the norms of feminine deportment in their times.

7.2 Future Trajectories

The work of translation and research behind this study has continued to raise more questions than a single study can treat. As I look ahead to writing a book based upon this initial study, I foresee several trajectories for deepening the analysis begun here. Firstly, this study has shown the fruitfulness of comparative readings to better understand the breadth of poetic interpretation. Future research could better integrate authors such as Basil of Seleucia and Amphilochius as well as examine the relationship of poetry to the interpretative procedure laid out in Theodore of Mopsuestia’s commentaries.

The literary nature of these portraits fashions the biblical character as exemplar in ways resonant with hagiography. The theme of boldness – especially female boldness – forms a leitmotif throughout these poems and ties this literature to hagiography and sermons. Through further integration of martyr narratives and engagement with ascetic literature, I would like to develop a longer piece on gender and self-assertion within early Christianity.
Lastly, Narsai stands as the most understudied figure among my three poets, and his works form a site of potential future research along a number of avenues. In-depth studies of Narsai’s verse offer greater clarity to our image of the School of Nisibis as a thriving intellectual center. At some point, I would like to examine further poems of Narsai for which there exists a similar poem in corpus of Jacob.

As works of interpretation, these poetic biblical women offer men and women alike models of faithful audacity to emulate. Deploying poetic rhetoric, these poets forged representations of women who resist domestication to familiar forms of virtue such as humility. As gendered exempla for the life of faith and the striving to achieve one’s best, these poems open paths for thinking about feminine agency beyond the dichotomy of oppression and resistance. Through assuming the voices of female biblical characters, poets exhorted their fellow Christians – men and women alike – to embrace the boldness of unshakeable faith.

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Appendix A: The Canaanite Woman

A.1 History of Interpretation

A.2 Narsai, Memra 33 “On the Canaanite Woman”

A.2.1 Manuscript History

While purportedly surviving in four manuscripts, two are currently available for examination.1 Fortunately, this particular work survives in the second-oldest surviving manuscript for Narsai’s poetry, Diyarbakir Ms. 70. This manuscript, copied near Erbil (in modern-day Iraq) in 1328, contains 38 mēmrē, 35 of which belong to Narsai. Examining the manuscript in 1907, Addai Scher observed that the arrangement of the mēmrē followed the liturgical year of Sundays and feast days.2 While this manuscript served as the base text for my edition, I included variants from Vatican Syriac Ms. 594. This manuscript was copied in 1918, by a Syrian Orthodox deacon in Mosul for a priest from Diyarbakir, a city in southeastern Turkey. There are two manuscripts attributed to the 19th century, known as Chaldean Patriarchate 70 (M3D) and Chaldean Patriarchate 240 (M5), originally located in Baghdad. These manuscripts are currently inaccessible to modern scholars and possibly destroyed in the midst of the violence that has consumed the region in recent history. We do know that the contents of these manuscripts follow the ordering of Diyarbakir 70. Citing this correspondence, W.F. Macomber argued that 19th century scribes used Diyarbakir ms. 70 as their source text.3 The paucity of variants between the Diyarbakir codex

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and the Vatican manuscript allows a certain degree of confidence in a relatively stable transmission history of “On the Canaanite Woman” as well as its attribution to Narsai as its author. I will base my edition and citations on the oldest extant manuscript, Diyarbakir Ms. 70 (D70) f. 204r-212r. This manuscript may be found at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library under Chaldean Cathedral (Mardin) 578.

A.2.2 Edition

D = D 70, f. 204r-212r
V = Vat. Sir. 594, f. 57v-61v

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4 Title V: ܙܩܪܘ ܙܩܪ ܓܢܣܢ ܒܪ ܒܝܕ ܣܢܐܐ ܡܢ ܫܒܝܬܢ ܕܐܦܢܝ ܒܪܝܟܘ ܥܘܢܝܐ. ܕܟܢܥܢܐ ܒܫܒܐ ܕܬܠܬ ܡܐܡܪܐ

5 V ܕܢܓܡܘ ܝܨܪܐ ܕܡܪܝܪܘܬܗ ܒܝܕ ܡܘܗܘܢ:

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293
бережה יあったו מ"דו הנקרעה וכן יש בו ידוע.

ồ 204v.

7 8 9 8
ساطير مختصر للكتاب المقدس 10

لا يوجد نص شامعي للاعتراف...

البيروني 11

نهاية躺 في ملك ساغر...

فائل ملكه يبكر به كما...

ومع ذلك في ملك...

البيروني 205ر.
الحمد لله من الذي يملك فعزه}

أنت جده من الذين يؤمنون بالله وacionala ويسعون في سبيله.

الآن جعلناك على وسيلة مفيدة لنا، فلكننا لنتصلب.

屏幕上 الإجابة:

لا يمكنني قراءة النص العربي بشكل طبيعي.

12 ^nئلمسا ُناَمكَ ُما كَنَّا ُفِي ُلَهْتَكَمَ ُمَنَّا.

13 ^ْلَمَا **فِي ُلَهْتَكَمَ ُفِي ُلَهْتَكَم*
凡谁愿意不拜它，存活的必得死去的必死。

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凡谁愿意不拜它，存活的必得死去的必死。

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凡谁愿意不拜它，存活的必得死去的必死。

凡谁愿意不拜它，存活的必得死去的必死。
طمعاً لأعمال أم ملكة عند السيدة ُ.

أصبحنا مستمرين في هذه الحياة برفقة الله.

BELIEF BLESSED IS THE STATE WHICH DESIGN IS TO EXPRESS ITSELF IN THE LADY AND TO BE CALLED THE STATE OF THE STATE.  

ما يغلي على روحنا من يعيش في ملكة الله.

ベルフ レスツ

24 F. 207r.
دارض الثاني
لا يُمكنني قراءة النص من الصورة.
301

[Paragraph in Aramaic script]

28 [Footnote: ḫahăš šārāyya lā le ḫiṣṭaśa]

29 [Footnote: in mg.]

30 [Footnote: written in bottom mg. as a correction to ḫahăš in the main text.]

31 [Footnote: F. 208r.]
��_indices
$m_3$, $m_4$, $m_5$, $m_6$, $m_7$, $m_8$, $m_9$, $m_{10}$:

$2F$,

$3F$, $1088v$,

$34$, $33$, $208v$.

$32$, $31$, written above the line in $V$
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة المقدمة.
304

36 F. 209v.
37 F. 209v.
38 F. 209v.
لا يعني هذا النص باللغة العربية.

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42 F. 210v.
43 316v. V
44 336v. V
تج.Collectors:

307
[316x75]307
[342x679]:
[342x679]ܕܢܟܠܗ
[372x683]45
[380x679]ܒܥܘܩܣܐ
[421x679]̇
[457x684]ܠܒܪܬܗ
[453x679]̇
[419x679]ܚܘܝܐ ܨܢܝܥܐ ܕܒܨܗ
[386x663].
[382x659]̇
[426x663]ܘܒܪܥܝܢܗ
[422x659]̇
[377x659]ܘܦܪܚܬ ܡܪܬܗ ܒܢܦܫܐ ܕܒܪܬܗ
[385x643]̇
[381x638]̇
[395x638]ܝܗ
[393x638]̈
[378x638]ܚܫܐ ܕܝܠܗ ElementsBy ܚܫܒܬܗ ܠܚܫܐ ܕܒܪܬ ܗ疳
[440x623]ܢܝ ܣܢܐܐ ܠܚܘܪܒܐ.
[438x618]̇
[360x618]ܘڵܐ ܐܬܒܝܐܬ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܫܒܐܒܠܐ ܪܒܐ ܝܬܝܒܐ ܗܘܬ ܐܝܟ ܕܥܠ ܡܝܬܐ:
[348x578]ܟܡܐ ܕܡܪܘܕܐ ܡܪܝܡ ܗܘܐ ܩܠܗ ܒܗܝܟܠ ܒܪܬܗ.
[369x561]ܢ:
[368x558]̈
[361x558]ܒܟܝܐ ܘܐܠܝܐ ܡܠܐ ܗܘܐ ܦܘܡܗ ܒܟܠ Սܕܢܝ ܐ ܕܠ
[431x538]̈
[472x542]ܠܐ ܫܓܝܫ
[470x538]̈
[524x543]ܡܥܐ ܗܘܬ ܩ
[522x538]̇
[412x538]ܟܕ ܫ ܡܝܘܐ.
[407x538]̇
[375x538]ܥ
[377x518]ܒܚܫܐ ܩܫܝܐ ܡܬܢܓܕܐ ܗܘܬ ܠܠܝ ܐܝܡܡ:
[467x503]ܠ ܦܓܪܐ ܘܒܘܠܗܝ ܢܦܫܐ.
[463x498]̇
[362x498]ܟܕ ܚܙܝܐ ܗܘܬ ܦܘܬ ܠܠܬܐ ܡܪܝܪ̈ܬܐ:
[462x477]̈
[512x475]ܦܘܡܗ ܡܢ ܝ ܠܐ ܫܠܝ ܝܗ .
[385x457]̈
[416x456]ܘ ܗܕܡ ܦܓܪܐ ܕܒܪܬܗ ܘܢܚ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܫܠܝ:
[462x477]̈
[512x475]ܡܢ ܝ ܠܐ ܫܠܝ ܝܗ .
[385x457]̈
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[512x475]ܡܢ ܝ ܠܐ ܫܠܝ ܝܗ .
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[416x456]ܘ ܗܕܡ ܦܓܪܐ ܕܒܪܬܗ ܘܢܚ ܥܕܡܐ ܕܫܠܝ:
[462x477]̈
[512x475]ܡܢ ܝ ܠܐ ܫܠܝ ܝܗ .
[385x457]̈
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[462x477]̈
[512x475]ܡܢ ܝ ܠܐ ܫܠܝ ܝܗ .
[385x457]̈
[416x456]ܘ ܗܕܡ ܦܓܪܐ ܕܒܪܬܗ ܝܘܬܪ̈ܢܐ ܩܢܬ ܛܥܝܬܐ ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ :
[470x399]ܓܗܝܬܐ ܕܫܐܕܐ ܘܒܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܕܫܡ ܒܪܘܝܐ.
[408x234]ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ:
[356x234]ܒܩܠܗ ܢܚܡܗ ܡܢ ܟܪܝܘܬܐ ܘܡܢ ܦܘܡ ܫܐܕܐ:
[484x298]ܐ ܕܙܒܢܐ ܘܠܐ ܫܘܠܡ.
[394x295]ܘܦܢܬ ܘܚܙܬ ܚܝܣܡ ܚܝܘܬܐ ܐܪܡܝ ܒܢܦܫܗ ܒܕܡܘܬ ܙܪܥܐ:
[377x254]ܘܗܒܒ ܦܐܪܐ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܒܓܘ ܪܥܝܢܗ .
[453x234]ܚܝܬ ܡܢ ܡܘܬܐ ܕܚܘܒ ܝ ܥܡ ܒܪܬܗ:
[356x234]ܠ ܫܐܕܐ ܗ ܘܠܒܫܬ ܢܚܬܐ ܕܗܝܡܢܘܬܐ ܕܠܐ ܡܬܚܒܠ.
[380x194]ܬܪܝܢ ܝܘܬܪ̈ܢܐ ܩܢܬ ܛܥܝܬܐ ܒܗܝܡܢܘܬܗ :
[361x174]ܓܗܝܬܐ ܕܫܐܕܐ ܘܒܝܬܝܘܬܐ ܕܫܡ ܒܪܘܝܐ.

45 ܒܥܘܩܣܐ ܒܥܘܣܩܐ
46 F. 211r.
47 F. 211r.
This verse is added in the margin.

F. 211v.
لا يوجد نص يمكن قراءته بشكل طبيعي من الصورة المقدمة.
Memra of Tuesday, on the Canaanite woman.

Refrain: Blessed is the one who rescued our captivity from the Hater by means of one of our race, who triumphed and made us triumph. My brothers!

The Hater of mankind made an assault on humanity iniquitously, and he destroyed the image which had been called by the name of the divine Essence.

The killer of mankind became intoxicated with envy towards humanity, and he troubled them with the ugly filth of his bitterness.

The rebel against mankind clothed himself with the zeal of anger, as to why mortals were called with the name of the (divine) Essence.

He armed himself with the weapons of beguiling in order to destroy them; with plots he sharpened his blade to shed their blood.

With all shapes he prepared himself for battle, so that he might fulfill the inclination of his bitterness by means of their death.
Crafty plots he devised within himself against their lives;
he dug deep and hid snares of death so that he might kill them.

His thoughts wove\(^1\) skillfully a net of iniquity,
so that it may seize and hold the prey of mankind within its womb.\(^2\)

On sea and land he extended his thoughts as snares,
and he chased after all the peoples and made them the food for death.

Within them he fought with their lives while they were not aware,
and he sent them as spies so that they might chase after their companions.

By their own means he waged war with their ranks and subdued them;

and with the swords of their thoughts he tore them to pieces.

He threw the quarrel of his rage into their thoughts,
and he incited them to fight one with another.

They destroyed one another as strangers, and they did not understand;

and they tore to pieces the bodies of their limbs as if (they were) not people.

He taught them (all) sorts of conflict according to his bitterness,

and he instructed them how to attack savagely.

He wrote a deceitful book on the pages of their minds,

that they may read in (it) iniquitously according to his will.

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\(^1\) V reads the verb in the singular, with Satan as the subject: “He wove his thoughts into a net of iniquity”.

\(^2\) V: “within his womb”.
He saw that they were eager to study within his books,

and he devoted himself to destroy them with not unseemly things.

He settled among them and he lived with them and they with him;

and even though they loved him, he hated them and oppressed them.

Not with true love did he enjoy the company of humans,

but (only) that through his company he might trouble the peace which was in them.

Under the pretext of love he drove them away from the truth,

and with enticements he led them astray with the fallacy of his words.

They became mad and raged – the demons through people and the people through demons –

and the world, sea and dry land, passed by in the likeness of a drunkard.

The Creator saw that the Evil One disturbed the peace of humanity,

and He sent his Hint to return people to the peace of his name.

He sent his Hint through a bodily messenger,

to convey through him the word of peace to humanity.

On the pages of his body He wrote down (the expression of) his loving will,

so that bodily beings would see what is hidden through that which is revealed.

Along with visible limbs He took on his will

and He approached them to teach them how to return to him.

He composed a (human) body in writing as (one would) a letter,

and the power of his hiddenness signed it and sealed it with his name.
He taught the body to read in itself the mystery of hidden things,
and to convey to its companions the interpretation of the mysteries.

As an army commander (the Creator) armed and sent him against the evil
one, so that by his victory his race might be set free from their debts.

The bodily one came forth (equipped) with the divine will,
and he raised his voice – hidden in that which is revealed – and the
demons quivered.

A new voice the rebels heard, one that cried through a body;
and they shook and were thrown into confusion by the novelty of the voice
which was unusual.

The power of the divine Essence roared in creation through the mouth of a
mortal;
the ranks of the powers of the evil one and of covetous death shook.

(The divine Power) called out the sound of Jesus’s name on the earth as
thunder,
and the demons wailed for they were not able to endure the greatness of
the sound.

With the sound alone he frightened those filled with pride;
and they began to recede from their dwelling places against their will.

Legion, the head of their ranks, heard the sound of (Jesus’s) name;
and terror seized him, he wailed and cried bitterly.

The news of the name of Jesus went out to all the regions;
and the nations and cities\(^3\) gathered together to listen to his word.

\(^3\) V: “city-dwellers.”
The hidden Hint gathered them together in the harbor of his love, so that they would come and calm their minds with the peace of his name. They heard that through his word He was persecuting demons and healing illnesses; and they came together from everywhere to take medicine for their sicknesses. There came out a woman in whose daughter a demon dwelt, to ask him for a spiritual medicine for the pain from the demon. Her thoughts along with her limbs prepared themselves to go after Jesus, and her emotions\(^4\) and senses began to aim for the goal of his name.

Who taught the daughter of Canaan, the slave of slaves, to go out and ask for freedom from the son of Abram? Who revealed to the Canaanite woman, the daughter of Ham, the accursed one, that the son of Shem is able to break the seal (giving her access) to the righteous one?

Who revealed to the worshiper of demons, who had been defiled by the demons, that at the voice of Jesus demons flee from their dwelling places? Who wrote for her a new book of the name of the Creator, for a soul which has grown old in the company of demons, haters of truth? Who showed the one who was always heading to the demons’ door to walk on the path of the faith of the one God?

\(^4\) I.e. inner movements/stirrings.
The hidden Hint suggested to her in her mind secretly:

“Shun the worship of idols and believe and be saved.”

It was He who equipped her with faith just as with a weapon,
to go out and to wage war with the rebel who had captured her daughter.

With faith, hope and love she equipped herself;
as with a sword she cut down the Evil One with the word of her mouth.

Her mind put on faith as a breastplate,
and she grasped hope as a shield by means of (her) emotions.

At the goal of love her thoughts aimed along with her limbs,
and she ascended to the lofty rank of the name of the triumphant ones.

With a hidden weapon she armed herself spiritually,
so she could engage in hidden war with the powers of the Evil One.

She knew that he was hidden, the Hater of mankind who was waging war
against her; and she prepared spiritual arms to confront his hiddenness.

In hiddenness she forged faith within her mind;
and she gained the power to contend with the Strong One.

In faith her limbs geared up in pursuit of her inclination,
and her senses and her emotions raised their voice to beg for mercies.

Mouth and mind alike called out with a humble voice,
and they seized the audacity of invincible faith.

As a trumpet the mind called out through the outer senses,
and the mouth expressed the pain of her inner sufferings.
An advocate became (her) mouth for (her) emotions before the court,
and the mute ones on behalf of those endowed with speech gave forth
plaintive sounds.

The accursed one’s daughter called out before the son of the Righteous
One resoundingly:

110 “Son of David, have pity and set me free, (in) my enslavement, from the
captor.

Son of Abram, rich in love, have pity upon the daughter of Canaan,
and save my life from the bondage of slavery to the Evil One.

The father of your father cursed my fathers through the mouth of the
Hidden One,

and subjected them to the heavy yoke of the Accuser.

115 Noah cursed our father who mocked and derided him impudently,
and he blessed your father who honored and loved wisely.

Just as with a rod the Just One chastened the one bold of heart,
and behold the punishment has extended to his offspring up till now.

Enough has our audacity been punished with scourges our father endured
120 as we have become servants to the servant who rebelled against the
Maker.

Enough has the iniquitous tyrant subjected the freedom of our souls,
as he mocked and derided the condition of human nature.

And if the offspring of the bold Ham owes the debt of slavery,
let them be the slaves to the Son of the just Shem rather than to the tyrant.

125 Even the just Noah thus explained it in his prophecy:
to Shem will Canaan pay servitude as to a lord.⁵

To you therefore we will repay⁶ the debt of love as owed,

for you are from that seed in which the freedom of humanity is inscribed.

You are the son of David, the son of Abraham, the son of Shem, and the son of Noah,

130 set free your slaves from the Strong One and let them be yours.

I have heard about the promise of life that David your father received;

seal his words by deeds as is becoming of you.

For the peace of humanity the divine Hint sent you;

bring into action the coming of your love towards those who are divided.

135 I have heard the news about you, which went out on the earth, and the rebellious ones feared;

and I went out so as to witness the revealed truth through experience.

By the name of your power I heard that people are chasing out demons;

and I came to receive the good news of your name and to bring it to the demons.

The tyrannical demon entered and shut himself up in the soul of my daughter;

140 he assaulted (her) with ruthlessness in order to rob her life’s vitality.

With no mercy he shakes her body and leads astray her soul,

and if your commandment does not reach her, her life will vanish. Send

⁶ Or “Let us repay.”
your hint swiftly as a messenger,

and let it reprimand the devil before he attempts to shed blood.

145 Give me the mark of the name of your power and I will show it to him,

and behold I am as anxious as a mother whose birth pangs have
overpowered her.

Write a letter and sign it with the power of your help,

and if he sees it, he will no longer flout your commandment.

With a wailing voice, the daughter of Canaan begged,

150 and the All-knower, as if he did not hear, put her off.

The disciples were astonished at the boldness of her request, at how much
she asked,

and they approached him and persuaded the Healer to send her away with
the power of his help.

Give her a medicine of the word of your mouth as you usually do,

and let her go and heal the pain (caused by) the demon who torments her
daughter.

155 The master answered to his disciples wisely:

I have not been sent except in order to heal the sons of Jacob.

The sheep who went astray from Israel I have come to seek,

so that they may return and enter the fold of life of the name of the creator.

For it is not suitable to give the bread of the free ones

to the Canaanites, voracious dogs, who have not been sated with iniquity.
The daughter of Ham heard that the master of the house called her “dog,”

and she grasped the hope that she too would live among the rank of the
dogs.
The woman who was lost saw the Lord of the flock who visited his sheep, and she hastened to enter the fold of his sweet words.

165 She saw that also the dogs search for food just like the heirs, and wisely she asked the master of the house for food.

Yes, it is true and you spoke well, good master;

I am a dog, and I am not worthy of the name of heir.

Yes, yours is the freedom of the free ones,

170 yet yours are also the sinners, the peaceful dogs.

Give food to the free ones as they deserve,

and let the dogs live from the crumbs of their tables.

Allow me to live from your aid among the ranks of the dogs,

just as you allow to live the mute creatures along with those who speak.

175 Grant me that I be worthy of the small remainder from your gift,

for there is no one among the created things which does not live from the treasure of your love.

Grant me that I receive my vital sustenance along with the silent ones, and I will live in grace as all the creatures which your Hint sustains.

O wisdom brought forth by a heart lost in error;

180 and (this heart) has learned and now teaches how to converse wisely.

O knowledge proceeding from a mind mired in sin, and rather than deceit (this mind) spoke truth before the All-knower.
O mind aged in the service of iniquity,
which has longed to engage with spiritual things not seen by it before.

Her modesty and her faith the All-knower regarded with wonder,
and He revealed and uncovered before the eyes of the onlookers the truth
of her soul.\(^7\)

It is not only now that He saw her and looked upon her with wonder as
one not knowing, for her faith had been seen by him well before she
spoke.

On her he looked before she fashioned the sound of (her) petition,
and He had heard the words of her mouth and of her thoughts.

He knew that the sweet fragrance of his Hint was going to heal the pain of
her daughter,

and it was clear to him that He was going to persecute the demon with the
power of his help.

It was not that he tried her by delaying and not listening to her words,
(but) the truth of her love\(^8\) He wanted to reveal to those who did not
know.

He certainly did not reject her or send away from his flock
the sheep that cried out for the love of the Shepherd of all.

Not as one unwilling to heal did he turn away and remain silent,

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\(^7\) Lines 185-186 are missing from V.
\(^8\) V has “his love.”
but He (wanted) people to gain boldness when asking for mercy.  
By her boldness He taught everyone to be bold in (asking for) his aid,  
and not to grow weak if one does not receive (aid) quickly.  
By his delay He showed favor for the circumcised people  
who took pride in being the household of the name of the Creator.  
He shut the door for the murmuring of the mouth of the bold ones (who would argue):  
Lo He abandoned the sons of Abraham and visited the pagans.  
He considered the hateful seed of their thoughts,  
and He uprooted it beforehand, not allowing it to grow and bear fruit.  
He knew that if He would answer the daughter of Canaan,  
they would argue with him: Why did He have pity on a servant of demons? He also knew that the woman’s love was true,  
and that she would not give up however much He would turn away and not answer her.  
On this pretext his Hint did not answer swiftly,  
so that He would reveal her truth and rebuke the pride of those uncircumcised in their heart.  
The sound of her words was pleasing to him more than any other sounds,  
and He was expecting her to continue and sing (even) more plaintive sounds.  
By his delay He aroused the honest heart  
to play upon the harp of the mouth (and produce) even more sounds of its petition.
By her petition He incited the (Jewish) people and taught the peoples to see the light of faith in the daughter of darkness.

She was from a nation which the demons had deprived of understanding, and as soon as she turned toward him, He gladdened with her light those who were in darkness.

As a torch her mouth contained the truth of her soul, and it surpassed the sphere of the sun in brightness.

Her voice became a herald in the ears of everyone:

Come all who are in need, utter sounds (of petition), and receive aid.

The Lord of the house saw that she was committed to live and to give life, and He made her voice into a guide toward reward.

With the sound of his reply He revealed the reward in the hereafter, (explaining) how He enriches the one who asks without despair.

O woman, very great is your faith;

and the whole world does not stand comparison with the truth of your love.

Your mind seized a strong power against the Evil One, and you are not overpowered by the Strong One who wages war against you.

Wise is your heart and shrewd is your inclination to contend, and no one knows how to engage in battle more than you.

Subtle is your thinking and skilled is your mind to distinguish rightly, and there is no bird whose wing is as swift as your emotions.
There is no athlete who knows how to embark upon the contest as well as you do,

and no archer who aims at the target as well as your endurance does.

Because your love endured and the voice of its entreaty has not grown weak,

240 behold, I pay your wage for the toils of your faith.

Because you have been patient and knocked on the door of divine mercy,

behold, I am opening the door to your voice: enter and take delight!

Because you counted yourself among the class of dogs, a dumb nature,

behold, I extend a fragment of mercy to your hunger.

245 Because your inclination distinguished wisely and called me “Lord,”

behold, I ascribe to your lost condition the name of the heirs.

Because you desired and longed ardently to be a lamb in the flock of my sheep,

behold, I imprint the seal of my lordship on your mind.

Because you had faith and believed firmly that my aid would be able to chase away demons,

250 Behold, I am confirming in deeds the truth of your soul.

Behold, I write down the power of aid which is hidden in my words,

and I am sealing it with the hidden Hint, and I am giving (it) to you.

Go and show to the impure demon the seal of my Being,

and behold, he will be terrified and will leave his weapon and will flee naked.
Go and tell him that Jesus said: Go out from your dwelling place, and go (and) be pained in the desert far removed from humanity.

Go and inform the over-thrower of humanity of his downfall: behold, torn down is the height of the deceitful building which you built on earth. Go and bring the good news to the killer of humanity, for lo, people have come to life through a man whose name is Jesus.

Go and explain to him the power of the meaning of my precious name, for the name of Jesus is a savior of mankind and an over-thrower of demons.

Go and tell him: behold the King has gone out after his own, return those whom you held captive and give an account of those who were lost.

Take for yourself the edict which the divine hand signed, and go and show to the tyrannical servant the annulment of his power.

And yes, true and irrevocable is the power of my words, behold, the words are followed by the deeds, even while they are distant. Behold the demon went out even before seeing the truth in that which was revealed, and he left his dwelling place as a fugitive before the Strong One.

Go and test the truth of my words through experience, and receive the proof of the great power of my proper authority. Behold, my will has issued a judicial decision concerning his wickedness, and he has begun punishing himself by departing.
Behold, he has heard the report that I am threatening his rebellious nature, and he cried and howled even before the terrible punishment reaches him.

Behold, the body that he tortured in his bitterness has come to rest now, and the mind that he led astray by his perturbation has been set straight.

The King from afar uttered a threat concerning the rebellious one, and the Hint went before the bearer of the writings.

While the messenger was waiting for the king to sign (it),

the Deceitful One departed so that his fraud would not be exposed openly.

Who taught the evil demon the revealed truth?

While the verdicts still were far away, he declared himself guilty.

Who revealed to the all-deceiver that he would be exposed?

He concealed himself from shame before the eyes of everyone.

Who revealed to the cunning wolf, destroyer of mankind:

behold, the Son of David has gone out to hunt you down just as his father did?

Who showed to the deceitful fox the pathway of the lion?

He slipped through the door in order not to be confounded by the power of his voice.

The Hint of power upset his heart and weakened his power,

and fear upset him and he left the cultivated land and came to love the desert.

With weeping and lamenting his mouth was filled while he was leaving.
for he saw how harsh the exile was into which he was thrown.

295 In the dwelling place of people he enjoyed himself with his dirty tricks,
and as he saw that he was driven out, he gave up and despaired, for there
was no consolation.

He saw that the daughter of Ham, a slave, was set free from his slavery,
and he knew that the yoke of his toil was removed from mortals.

In the Canaanite woman he learned and it was revealed to him how great
his dishonor was,

300 for if the daughter of the cursed one broke his yoke, who would take
account of him?

Great is the terror that took hold of the Evil One in this matter,
and the feeble rib overcame his wiles and trampled his pride underfoot.

Great is the wonder that she performed through endurance,
for she engaged in the battle with the Strong One, and she was not
defeated.

305 A great war did the daughter of Ham wage with the rebellious one,
and as arrows did she shoot at him words of faith.

O the strong one who was overpowered by the voice in which he took
pride
when he heard the voice of sounds inside Paradise.

O the courageous one who was defeated by the power that he defeated in
Eden,

310 and the hands which he bound by the eating of the fruit bound him (now).
With the eating of the fruit he bound Eve who obeyed his word,
and the fruit returned from inside her limbs and trampled him on the earth.
With the weapon of fruit the guilty one triumphed and made Adam guilty,
and in the Son of Adam he was defeated and exposed, for he did not
triumph.

Upon the harp of Eve he played his tunes of deathly bitterness,
and in the daughter of Eve he heard the tidings of the annulment of death.

In Eden he composed joyful tunes as one victorious,
and here he lamented in a voice of groans as one condemned.

With harsh suffering he was groaning, while he heard

that everyone was giving blessing to Mary for the fruit that she bore.

He lamented as for a dead one, the mourning for whom is bitter
while he was fleeing from the sound of the name of David’s Son.

He heard the voice of the woman when she was calling out after Jesus:
Son of David, save the daughter of your house from the strong one.

Seemly was her voice when she was asking for mercy for her daughter,
and very hateful it was for Satan, the hater of humanity.

At the sound of her sighs the crowds on high marveled,
and the rank of the demons was saddened and was in mourning beyond
measure.

As long as she held the name of Jesus on the tip of her tongue,
the troubled demon was intensely embittered.

As long as she prayed with boldness for aid
the demon wept and lamented his ruin.
O the humble one who gained the power to prevail over demons,
while those who overpower humans with desires trembled at her voice.

O the subjected one who was enslaved to false worship;
she broke herself free from the servitude of the harsh master.

O the destitute one the dwelling of whose soul the demons had destroyed,
while her voice appeased the temple of her daughter which was ruined.

O you, merciful mother, how great is your love
that you donned armor against the evil one who had captured your daughter!

O you, woman who through the sacrifice of your faith
pleased the King and reversed your captivity from the captor.

O how much you believed and how much you loved and how much you endured;
and the strength of your soul did not weaken in its confidence.

O nature, how much is the order of its bondage preserved!
For (nature) restored and requited the love which is proper to human nature.

Nature goaded the Canaanite woman like a sting,
and she suffered much for the daughter of her womb whom the demon harassed.
The crafty serpent pierced her daughter with his deceitful sting,
and the poison flew into the soul of her daughter and into her mind.

As her own pain did she regard the pain of the daughter of her limbs,
and she was not comforted until the adversary departed into the desert.

With great mourning she sat as with a dead person

as long as the Rebellious One raised his voice in the temple of her daughter.

355 With weeping and lamentation her mouth was filled at all times

when she heard the disturbed voices which the demon chanted.

With grievous pain she was beaten by night and by day,

while seeing the twisting of the body and the distress of the soul.

Her mouth was not quiet from bitter wailing

360 until the body of her daughter was quiet and her limbs were calm.

The flow of tears from her eyes and from her thoughts did not cease

until she saw that the source of the bitterness of the evil one dried up.

She did not take off the armor of lamenting from her mind

365 until she heard that voice: the demon has gone.

She did not think that her daughter was among the living even though she was alive

until Jesus’s voice raised her as from the grave.

By his voice he raised her from sickness and from the mouth of the demon,

and she returned and saw the present life and the eternal life.

The medicine of life He threw in her soul like a seed,

370 and the fruit of faith blossomed within her mind.

She came to life from the death of the demon’s destruction, she and her daughter,
and she donned the garment of incorruptible faith.

Two benefits did the one (who once was) in error gain through her faith:

the deliverance from the demon and belonging to the household of the name of the Creator.

Through the stick with which the demon punished her daughter she gained understanding,

and she learned the way to journey on the path toward the Hidden One.

Also to the demon a double the pain was added:

while he thought that he was (the one) chastising, instead he became the one being punished.

In the trap which he set the rebellious one fell unknowingly,

and his deceit returned upon his mind as it was written.

He wanted to pacify his own dwelling place and to destroy humans,

and the Hint destroyed his deceitful building and pacified humans.

With the filth of his wrath he wanted to undo the sweetness of peace,

and peace shut out his bitterness from (the world of) mortals.

As with wine he intoxicated them with his fury,

and once he experienced spiritual drink, he forgot its must.

As slaves he enslaved the earthly ones,

and one from them rose up and set them free from his slavery.

As contemptible ones he mocked the sons of the earth,

and a bodily one raised his voice, and he trembled before him.

He was comfortable and quiet in the dwelling place of humans like a king,
and he heard the report of the ruler of people and he shook and was terrified.

Deathly birth pangs seized him at once like a woman giving birth, when he saw people driving out demons in the name of a man.

395 What is this? – one demon asks his fellow demon –

for lo, our armies are in panic through the voice of a man.

When was the army of the strong ones overcome by the weak as now the earthly ones have persecuted the spiritual ones?

When did those sick in body heal their limbs

400 as garments of a body are healing the sick bodies?

When did a slave set free the slaves from enslavement as now Jesus gives freedom to people?

Perhaps that which is written concerning a human has come to fulfillment, namely that he would tread upon the head of our forces when he will be triumphant.

405 Perhaps it is the time of the completion of the words of Balaam the priest, and this is the one whom he called the star of light which will enlighten humans.

Perhaps true is the saying of the words of that spiritual person, who announced his conception and called him Lord and the Son of the most High.

That which is happening in this time has never happened before

410 that the people cry out in the name of a human and the demons shake.
It has never been heard that the dead lived without petition
as this one raises the dead as from sleep.

These things they said, the haters of humanity, one with his neighbor
for they saw a human was bringing the people back from their side.

They saw that the deceitful nets of the devices of their troublemaking were
cut to pieces;
the prey escaped which they had hunted from Adam until now.

They saw even a small bird, weak of wing, broke the snare
and it flew and went beyond the fear of their injuries.

In the Canaanite Woman they saw their own downfall,
how the weak rib prevailed against the might of the demons!

Come! Feeble race which was defeated by sin, take courage
and don spiritual weapons, join the battle and win!

In your mind hold the shield of faith,
and crown your intellect with the helmet of the salvation of life.

Secretly arm your thoughts with wisdom,
and learn the ways how to contend with the spiritual ones.

He is not corporeal, the hater who fights against your lives,
but rather (he is) a spirit who engages in battle with hidden impulses.

Prepare spiritual weapons to confront his concealment,
wage war and conquer by means of the endurance of your minds.

Guard us with your living sign so that the evil one will see it and depart
Appendix B: Hemorrhaging Woman

B.1 History of Interpretation

With the history of interpretation, the sexual valence of the woman’s state is brought out through intertextual links. Origen, in his third homily on Leviticus, cites the New Testament pericope when explicating what touch is, and what renders touch clean or unclean.¹ Origen prefaces his discussion of the Hemorrhaging woman with a verse from 1 Corinthians 7:1: “It is well for a man not to touch a woman.”² In this chapter from Paul’s epistle, a bedrock text for ascetically-minded exegetes, the apostle counsels his readers to imitate his celibacy and to enter into marriage only as a way to avoid immoral sexuality. Origen links the Pauline verse with Jesus’s admonition in Matthew 5:28 that any man who looks at a woman with lust has already committed adultery in his heart. For the Alexandrian interpreter, the heart of such a man has “touched” the passion of lust and effectively defiled his soul.³ In the case of the Hemorrhaging woman from the Gospels, Origen alleges that “she had touched sin and therefore had incurred the “scourge” of the flesh” before she is cured by touching Jesus’s hem. Touch alternatively defiles and cleanses within Origen’s reading, but the source of defilement must be lust, sexual or otherwise.

² 1 Cor 7:1 Περὶ δὲ ὧν ἐγράψατε, καλὸν ἄνθρωπο γυναικὸς μὴ ἀπετεθῇ
³ PG12.424; Origen, On Leviticus, 3.2.1
What has gone unobserved is the lengthy treatment of the text within the *Commentary on the Diatessaron* attributed to Ephrem which features multiple interpretative angles upon the biblical text. Roughly following the Gospel progression, the woman with a hemorrhage first appears after the healing of demon possessed men in the region of Gadarenes (cf. Mt 8:28-34; Mk 5:1-20; Lk 8:26-39). In the very first lines, the *Commentary* sets out the theme of revelation through the woman’s illness: “Praise to you, hidden offspring of (divine) Being, for your healing was proclaimed through the hidden suffering of the afflicted woman. By means of a woman whom they could see, they were enabled to see the divinity which cannot be seen.”\(^4\) Throughout the *Commentary* this revelatory function of the woman’s healing is emphasized.\(^5\)

In contrast to later poetic accounts, the *Commentary* shows a very limited interest in the language of purity. This discourse appears in the context of discussing the human and divine natures of Christ, specifically how this incident reveals his divinity. An important thread within this reading is that Jesus’s purity is uncompromised by his proximity to her uncleanness:

> A power was sent forth therefore which emanated from him. It touched the unclean womb but was not ashamed. Similarly, his divinity was not ashamed to dwell in the pure womb. Whether within the Law, or outside the Law, the virgin was purer than she who was rendered unclean because


of the flow of her blood. His enemies were being denounced because [their] freewill was very wrongly disobedient to him to whom the unrestrained flow of blood in nature was obedient.\(^6\)

The author(s) here make a clear comparison between the pure womb of Mary and the ailing womb of the afflicted woman.

Writing in the mid-ninth century, Ishoʿdad of Merv transmits the account of the Hemorrhaging woman found in Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* within his commentaries on the New Testament. He skips over the narrative when commenting on the Gospel of Matthew, but he recalls the account of Eusebius in his commentary on the pericope in Mark and Luke. Ishoʿdad reflects later development of the woman’s character both in Eusebius’s *Ecclesiastical History* as well as the *Acts of Pilate*, an apocryphal text which gave her the name Berenice (or Veronica) in later tradition.\(^7\) His account demonstrates how later Christians continued to associate the woman’s story with healing miracles, a critical feature of her reception history:

This, that *the fountain of her blood was dried up*; Berenice, the afflicted one, *whose blood had flowed for twelve years*, and whose illness was *abscesses*, when our Lord had ascended to heaven, out of the great love that she had for him, she made a bronze image for him and erected it at the door of her house, and another of herself near it, in the form (or manner) (Syr. ܢܘܚܝܐ, Gr. σχῆμα) of one asking him for healing; and by divine action there sprung up in the leg of the image of our Lord a branch of wood, and it made leaves and performed miracles like that of our Lord, in every place to which they carried some of its leaves for a

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long time, and afterwards the Jews were envious and cut it, and it did not again spring up.\footnote{Isho’dad of Merv, \textit{Commentaries on the New Testament}, ed. and trans. M.D. Gibson (repr. Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2005), II.218 (Syriac text) and I.132 (English translation). [trans. alt.]}

Isho’dad does not delve deeply into the particulars of the New Testament text, but his account is of interest for his characterization of the woman’s illness beyond the report of Eusebius. He employs a Greek loanword $ܣܘܪ̈ܓܐ$ (alt. $ܣܘܪ̈ܢܓܐ$) for $σῦριγξ$ meaning “fistulous sore or abscess.”\footnote{Michael Sokoloff, \textit{A Syriac Lexicon}, s.v. $ܓܐ$ $ܣܘܪ$. The two translations offered are “tear ducts” and “hemorrhoids” with this instance from Isho’dad of Merv as the lone example. If one looks to the original Greek, the semantic range seems to be much broader ranging from a pipe to any type of duct or channel. It is used within medical literature for sore (LSJ, ninth edition, s.v. $σῦριγξ$). [Add reference to Galen 6.244]}

Eusebius employs the Matthean term $αἱμόρροος$ to describe her ailment. Isho’dad repeats the reference to Eusebius’s account when commenting on the Lukan text, but here he adds she was “from the peoples” ($ܡܐ̈ܡܢ ܥܡ$), a Gentile.\footnote{Isho’dad of Merv, \textit{Commentaries on the New Testament}, III.34 (Syriac text) and I.168 (English).}

The speculation about the Gentile identity of the woman is also found in the reading of Jerome.\footnote{Cf. Jerome, \textit{Evangelium secundum Marcum}, PL 29.590.}

\section*{B.2 Romanos, “On the Woman with a Flow of Blood”}

\subsection*{B.2.1 Diplomatic Greek Text}

\textbf{Manuscript title: κοντάκιον εἰς τὴν αἱμόρρουν}

\textbf{Liturgical context (according to manuscript):} for Wednesday of the sixth week of Easter.

\textbf{Manuscript:} Patmos 213 (Q), f. 142r–143v.


Acrostic: ψαλμὸς τοῦ κύρου Ῥωμανοῦ

Refrain: Σῶτερ, σῶσον με (“Savior, save me!”)

Προοίμιον

Ὡς ἡ αἱμόρρους προσπίπτω σοι, Κύριε, ὁπρὸς τοῦ ἄλγους με ρύση, φιλάνθρωπε,12 καὶ πταισμάτων μοι παράσχῃς συγχώρησιν, ἵνα ἐν κατανύχει13 καρδίας κραυγάζω σοι· “Σῶτερ σῶσον με.”

1

Ψάλλω σοι ἐν ᾠδαῖς, ἄναξ ὕψιστε, ὅτιπερ οὐ στερεῖς με τῆς δόξης σου· παρορᾷς μου γὰρ τὰ ἁμαρτήματα, θέλων μετανοεῖν εὑρεῖν με, ύπάρχων φύσει ἀναμάρτητος· ὅθεν λίττομαι σου ἐμοὶ γενέσθαι τὴν σὴν μακροθυμίαν εἰς ἐπιστροφὴν καὶ μὴ εἰς καταφρόνησιν, ὅτι βοῶ· “Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.”

2

Ἀφθαρσίας ποσὶν γῆς ἐπέβης νῦν πᾶσι καταμερίζων ἰάματα· πηροῖς γὰρ ἐδωρήσω ἀνάβλεψιν, παρειμένοις δὲ ἐδώκας σύσφιγξιν χειρὶ καὶ λόγῳ καὶ θελήματι· οὕτως οὖν ἐπακούσασα ἡ αἱμόρρους σοὶ προσήλθε σωθῆναι, συγάμα φωνῇ, τῇ παλάμῃ δὲ κράζουσά σοι ἐκτενῶς:

12 Cf. Ulpian Digest 50.14.2 where this term is applied to the emperor.
14 Lampe, Patristic Lexicon, s.v. μακροθυμία. This word could be translated also as “patience” and “long-suffering.”
“Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.”

3

Λανθανόντως, σωτήρ, σοὶ προσήρχετο, καὶ γὰρ ἄνθρωπον μόνον ἐνόμιζεν·
ιομένη δὲ ἐξεπαιδεύετο ὅτι σὺ Θεός ἁμα καὶ ἄνθρωπος.
Λαθραίος ηπίστατο ὅτι σὺ Θεὸς ἅμα καὶ ἄνθρωπος, ὑπὸ σοῦ ἐσυλήθη δὲ κράζουσά σοι:
“Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.”

4

Μαθεῖν θέλεις σαφῶς πῶς σεσύληται ὁ σωτήρ καὶ ἐσύλησεν, ἀκροατά; Ὁ σωτὴρ εἶπε· ἀπόσυλε τῇ χειρί, ἀποστραφῇ με βοῶσαν αὐτῷ·
“Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.”

5

Οὐ γὰρ μόνον εἰκὸς ἐλογίζετο ἡ αἵματος καὶ ἔλεγεν καθ ἑαυτήν· Ἄρων ἀφέτερον ἐπηράνετο τὴν τῆς κόρης σωτηρίαν καὶ εἰς ἀπόγνωσιν ταύτην ἐνέβαλλε·
εἰ γὰρ ἐγνώρισεν, ἐμάνθανεν ὁ ἐχθρὸς τὴν τῆς κόρης σωτηρίαν, ἐὰν ἀποστραφῇ με βοῶσαν αὐτῷ·
“Aἱμάτων ῥύσιν ὁ ἀμώμητος ἐὰν ἴδῃ, χωρεῖ μου ὡς ἀκαθάρτου, καὶ δεινότερον ἔσται μοι τοῦτο πλῆκτος, εὰν ἀποστραφῇ με βοῶσαν αὐτῷ. ‘Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.’

15 This word is relatively rare in biblical literature, appearing twice in the Septuagint. Its appearance in 1 Sam 24:4 (LXX 1 Reg 24:5): “And David’s men said to him, ‘Behold, this is the day on which the lord spoke to you to give your enemy into your hands, and you shall do to him as is good.’ And David arose and stealthily removed the corner of Saul’s double cloak” (καὶ εἶπον οἱ ἄνδρες Δαυιδ πρὸς αὐτὸν ἰδοὺ ἡ ἡμέρα αὕτη, ἥν εἶπεν κύριος πρὸς σὺν ἐφοδιάσαν σου ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖς σου καὶ ἐπηράνετο τῷτε πλῆκτος της διπλοΐδος της Σαουλ. Λαθραίος). The word is also found in 1 Macc 1:19.

16 Romanos’s word choice here is extremely odd since there is not an indication in the biblical story that the woman is young. If anything she is contrasted to Jairus’s daughter as a mature woman. It is not clear that this needs to be translated as distinct from ἡ γυνή. According to Maisano, the term does not refer to the age of the woman but her marital state, namely that she is unmarried (Romano il Melodo, 310, n. 5).
Συνωθοῦσί με πάντες ὁρῶντές με, 'Ποῦ νυνὶ σὺ προσέρχεις;'
βοῶντές μοι.

'Κατανόησον, γύναι, τὸ αἰσχὸς σου, γνῶθι τὶς τίνι θέλεις ἐγγίσαι νυνὶ;
tῷ ἀμωμήτῳ ἡ ἀκάθαρτος; Ἄπιθι καὶ καθάρθητι ἀπὸ ρύπου,
καὶ τὸν σπίλον τὸν σὸν ἀποσμήξασα,
tότε τούτῳ προσέρχει βοῶσα φωνή·
"Σῶτερ σῶσόν με."

'Tοῦ ἐμοῦ πάθους τάχα βουλεύεσθε χαλεπότεροι, ἄνδρες, γενέσθαι μοι;
Μὴ γὰρ νῦν τῇ ἀγνοίᾳ κεκράτημαι; Οἶδα ὅτι αὐτὸς καθαρὸς ἐστιν,
όθεν αὐτῷ καὶ προσελεύσομαι τῶν ὀνειδισμῶν ρυσθῆναι καὶ
tῶν κηλίδων·
mὴ κολάσῃς ὅπου ῥῶσιν ὑπόμνημα τοῦ τίνος'
dιό λάττωμι ὅπερε κράζαι ἐμὲ·
"Σῶτερ σῶσόν με."

'Oὐ νοεῖς τί αἰτεῖς, γύναι· ἅπιθι, μὴ ἡμεῖς υπὸ μέμψιν γενώμεθα.
Ἂν ἐάσωμέν σε, πάντες αἴτιοι τῆς αὐτοῦ ἀτιμίας δεικνύμεθα·
ἐὰν δὲ πάλιν σε θεάσωνται οἱ φοιτῶντες αὐτῷ νῦν προσιοῦσαν,
ὁσπέρ καταφρονοῦντας μέμψονται ἡμᾶς καὶ ὡς ἄφρονα κρινοῦσιν, ὅτι βοᾷ·
"Σῶτερ σῶσόν με."

'𝚈μεῖς, δύσμοροι, φθόνῳ κεκράτησθε, ὅθεν ἐὰν θυμωθῇ οὐκ ἐστιν
ὑπὸ μέμψιν·
ἐὰν δὲ σώσῃ μὲ τῆς πλῆθης τῆς ἐμῆς,
tὴν αἰσχύνην κομίσῃς, ὅτι βοᾷ·
"Σῶτερ σῶσόν με."

Καθορᾶτε αὐτοῦ τὰ ἰάματα, καὶ τί τους προσιόντας κωλύετε;
Καθ’ ἐκάστην βοᾷ καὶ προτρέπεται· "Δεῦτε πρὸς με νῦν, οἱ
κοπιῶντες κακοίς. 17

τὰ πάντα εἰδὼς πρὶν γενέσεως, ὅστις πρὶν οὐκ ἠγνοεῖ τί πέπονθε, στραφεὶς εἶπε πρὸς τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ: “Τίς ἤψατο νῦν τοῦ κρασπέδου μου καὶ ἔλαβεν ὅπερ ἠθέλησε; Πῶς φυλάττετε οὖν τὸν θησαυρόν μου; Γρηγορούντων ὑμῶν τῶν ἐμῶν μαθητῶν μὴ κλαπεὶς ἐσυλήθης χειρί: “Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.”

17 Romanos expands the biblical reference to Mt 11:28 with κακοίς, adding emphasis to the nature of these burdens.

18 Mt 11:28.
Ὑπὸ τίνος αὐτὸ τοῦτο γέγονεν; Ὑμεῖς γνῶναι ὀφείλετε, φίλοι μου· νῦν ἐγνώρισα τὸ δραματούργημα, νῦν ὑμῖν ἐκκαλύπτω τὸν κλέψαντα δυνάμεις τρόπῳ πῶς ἐχρήσατο· ἀφωνίᾳ προσῆλθεν ἐμοὶ βοῶσα καὶ κρατοῦσα στολὴν ὥσπερ ἐπιστολήν, θεραπείαν ἐδρέψατο κράζουσά μοι· 'Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.'

Ῥῶσιν ἔλαβεν ἡ προσελθοῦσά μοι, δύναμιν ἐπὶ ὡς ἑλήστευσεν· τί μοι φθέγγει, ὁ Σίμων Βαριωνά, ὁ ὁχλοὶ πολλοὶ με συνέχουσιν; Ὁ ψαύοισθεν μου τῆς θεότητος· αὐτή, ψαύσασα δὲ στολὴς ὡς ἐπιστολήν, θείας φύσεως σαφῶς ἐξεράζετο καὶ ὑγείαν ἐκτήσατο κράξασά μοι· 'Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.''

Ὡς κατεῖδεν δὲ ὅτι οὐκ ἔλαθεν, ἡ γυνὴ ταῦτα συνελογίζετο, φησὶν ὅτι 'Ὀφθῶ τῷ σωτῆρί μου Ἰησοῦ, καθαρθεῖσα τοὺς σπίλους μου· οὐκέτι φόβος γὰρ ὅτι οὐκ ἔστι μοι· τῇ βουλῇ γὰρ αὐτοῦ ἐξετέλεσα τοῦτο· ο ἡθέλησε, τοῦτο καὶ ἐδράσα· ἐν γὰρ πίστει προσῆλθον βοῶσα αὐτῷ· 'Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.'

Μὴ οὐκ ἤδει ὁ πλάστης ὃ ἔπραττον, ἀλλ' ἠνέσχετό μου ὡς καὶ εὐσπλαγχνός· μόνον ψαύσασα ρῶσιν ἐτρύγησα, ἐπειδή ἡ μιᾷ συνέλθη. Διὸ οὐ δεδοικα ὄρθηναι νῦν τὸ Θεό μου κηρύττουσα ὅτι ἔστιν ἰατρὸς ἀσθενῶν καὶ σωτὴρ τῶν ψυχῶν καὶ δεσπότης τῆς φύσεως, ὄπερ βοῶ· 'Σῶτερ σῶσόν με.'

Ἀγαθῷ ἰατρῷ σοι προσέφυγον ἀπορρήτωρ μοι νῦν τὸ ὁδειὸς. Κατ' ἐμοῦ τὸν θυμόν μὴ ἐγειρήσῃς σου, μηδὲ τῇ θεραπαίνῃ τῇ σῇ ὀργίσθῃς· ὃ γὰρ ἡθέλησας ἐτέλεσα· πρὶν λογίσωμαι γὰρ ποιήσαι τὸ ὄργανον.
σὺ ὑπῆρχες συμβιβάζων με πρὸς αὐτό·
tὴν καρδίαν μου ᾔδεις κραυγάζουσάν σοι·
ʻΣῶτερ σῶσόν με.’’’

19

“Νῦν νευρώθητι, γύναι, τῇ πίστει σου θέλοντά με συλήσασα·
θάρσει λοιπόν·
oὐ γὰρ ἐνεκεν τοῦ ἐλεγχθῆναι σε τούτων πάντων εἰς μέσον
παρήγαγόν σε,
ἀλλ’ ἓνα τούτους νῦν πιστώσωμαι ὅτι συλούμενος χαίρω, οὐκ ἀπελέγχω·
ὅθεν ἔσο λοιπὸν ὑγιαίνουσα,
μέχρι τέλους τῆς νόσου σου κράζουσά μοι·
ʻΣῶτερ σῶσόν με.’’’

20

Οὐ χειρὸς τῆς ἐμῆς τούτο ἔργον νῦν, ἀλλὰ πίστεως τῆς σῆς τὸ κάτεργον·
pολλοὶ ἥψαντο γὰρ τοῦ κρασπέδου μου, τῆς δυνάμεως δὲ οὐκ ἐπέτυχον,
ἐπειδὴ πίστιν οὐ προσήγαγον· σὺ δὲ πίστει πολλῇ ἐμοῦ ἁψαμένη
tὴν υγείαν ἔδραψω, οὐκ ἐπὶ νῦν
ἐπὶ πάντων προήγαγον, ἵνα βοᾷς·
ʻΣῶτερ σῶσόν με.’’’

21

ʼΥἱὲ τοῦ Θεοῦ ἀκατάληπτε, δι’ ἡμᾶς σαρκωθεὶς ὡς φιλάνθρωπος,
ὡς ἐκεῖνην αἰμάτων τὸ πρότερον, ὅτως ἁμαρτημάτων με λύτρωσαι,
ὑπάρχον μόνος ἁμαρτητῆς· ταῖς εὐχαῖς καὶ πρεσβείαις τῶν ἁγίων
κλίνων μου τὴν καρδίαν, μόνε δυνατέ,
ἐπὶ τὸ μελετᾶν σου τοὺς λόγους ἅει,
ἵνα σώσῃς με.

B.2.2 Translation

Prelude:

As the bleeding woman, I prostrate myself before you, Lord,
that you may rescue me from pain, Benevolent One,
and grant forgiveness for my mistakes,
so with compunction of heart, I may cry to you,
“Savior, save me!””
Strophe 1:

I praise you, exalted king, in songs, so do not deprive me of your glory; you disregard my sins, for you are sinless by nature and wish to find me repenting; thus I entreat you that your forbearance bring me to correction and not to neglect, so I may call out: “Savior, save me!”

Strophe 2:

You set your incorruptible feet upon the earth, distributing remedies to all; to the blind you gave sight, upon the paralyzed you bestowed strength by your hand, and word, and will; having heard such things the bleeding woman came to you to be saved; she kept silent in her voice yet with her hand she cried to you fervently: “Savior, save me!”

Strophe 3:

Furtively she approached you, Savior, for she thought you were only a man, but when she was cured, it was impressed upon her that you are at the same time God and human. Secretly she touches your hem—her palm laying ahold, her soul trembling; she thought she would rob you with her hand, but she was robbed by you while crying to you: “Savior, save me!”

Strophe 4:

Do you wish to learn exactly, listener, how the Savior was robbed and himself did rob? The woman grasped what she had to do, but because of the theft she kept silent; for if she had revealed it, the Enemy would have learned about the healing of the young woman and driven her to despair;

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1 Mt 9:20-23; Mk 5:25-35; Lk 8:43-49.
2 Mt 9:20; Mk 5:7; Lk 8:44. Κρασπέδου is a relatively rare word in the New Testament, but there is a connection between healing and the hem of a garment in Mt 14:36 and Mk 6:56.
in silence, therefore, he heeded her
“Savior, save me!”

Strophe 5:

For the bleeding woman not only pondered, but probably also said to herself:
“How will I be perceived by the All-Seeing One since I bear the shame of my errors? 3
If the unblemished one sees the flow of blood, he will withdraw from me as one unclean,
it will be more terrifying to me than a blow,
if he turns away from me when I cry to him:
‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 6:

Upon seeing me, everyone crowds around me, yelling out, ‘Now where are you going?
Think about your shame, now, woman! Don’t you realize whom you wish to approach?
The impure one to the undefiled one? Go away and purify yourself from filth,
and when you have wiped away your stain,
then you can go up to this man and call out with your voice: 4
“Savior, save me!”’

Strophe 7:

‘Perhaps you men wish to be harsher on me than my suffering?
I am not seized by ignorance, am I? I know that he is pure—that is why I will approach him, to be delivered from the reproach and the stains.
Do not hinder me, then, from regaining my strength,
wherefore I beg—let me cry out:
“Savior, save me!”’

Strophe 8:

3 Ancient and modern commentators alike have read this through the lens of Lev 15:19-30.
4 Maisano notes the contrast between the image of the βοῶσα φωνῇ here and the σιγῶσα φωνῇ in strophe 2, line 4 (Romano il Melodo, 311, no. 9.)
‘You do not know what you’re asking, woman; go away lest we be blamed.
If we permit you, we’ll all be found guilty of his dishonor,
if, moreover, those converging around him see you approach, they will blame us for the disdain
and judge us idiots since you call out:
“Savior, save me!”’

Strophe 9:
‘You wretches have been so overtaken by envy that you do not wish me to be saved.
The spring gushes forth streams for all. Why do you block it?
Look, I go to my Maker, and if he becomes angry, he is not to blame,
but if he saves me from the wound that I have,
you will be left with the shame, for I’m calling out:
“Savior, save me.”

Strophe 10:
You notice his remedies, so why do you hinder those who approach him?
Daily he calls out and exhorts, “Come to me now, you who are weary
From hardships
for I will give you rest.”¹⁵ He delights in bestowing the gift of health to all,
so why do you, as if for the sake of honor,
bully and hinder me from calling out to him:
“Savior, save me!”?

Strophe 11:
Why did I let you see me? I’m about to acquire a strength you don’t know.
Are you not the initiates of Christ? Then why do you follow him begrudingly?
You are tripping up⁶ the undefiled one, so step aside, for he is not alone!
You exhale the stench of envy—of bloodshed;
thus you are preventing me from calling out:
“Savior, save me!”’

¹⁵ Mt 11:28.
⁶ Within the Septuagint πτερνίζω may imply overthrowing or supplanting.
Strophe 12:

Perhaps the one with a hemorrhage spoke these words to those wishing to drive her away, yet secretly she laid hold of his hem;\(^7\) just as she tried to pillage the man who in his divinity never sleeps, so also Christ endured being robbed, he who once had stolen the rib of Adam in Eden,\(^8\) and had shaped the woman who now cries out by theft: “Savior, save me!”

Strophe 13:

The One who knows all things before their inception, who was not unaware beforehand of her suffering, turned to his apostles, saying: “Who grasped my hem just know and took what they wanted?\(^9\) How are you guarding my treasure?\(^{10}\) While you, my disciples, were standing watch lest I be robbed, I was plundered by a hand calling out: ‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 14:

By whom was this done? You, my friends, should know. I just disclosed the plot, and now I reveal who stole the power, in what way and how it was used.\(^{11}\) Voicelessly she came and called to me and grasped my robe as a letter;\(^{12}\) she acquired healing for herself as she cried to me: ‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 15:

The woman who approached me seized strength, for she robbed me of

\(^{7}\) Mt 9:20  
\(^{8}\) Gen 2:21-22.  
\(^{9}\) Mk 5:30; Lk 8:45.  
\(^{10}\) This resembles the questions that Mary poses to Joseph in SC 36 / Oxf. 12 l. 4: \πῶς οὐκ ἐφύλαξας τὴν παρθενίαν μου;  
\(^{11}\) This was a very difficult line to translate, but I understood δυνάμει as a dative of means. A more free translation might be: “I shall reveal how the one who stole did so with a ruse.” See also Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 315 no 15.  
\(^{12}\) Koder, Die Hymnen, 785. Note the word play between στολή and ἐπιστολή.
power.
Why do you announce, Simon son of Jonah, that a great throng surrounds me?\textsuperscript{13}

They do not touch my divinity; while she, who touched a visible robe, clearly grasped my divine nature and acquired health as she cried to me:

‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 16:

Realizing that she had not escaped notice the woman reasoned thus, saying: “I was seen by my Savior, Jesus, when I was cleansed of my stains. I am no longer afraid, for by his will I carried this out. What he wanted, I accomplished; for in faith I turned, and I called out to him:

‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 17:

As Maker, he knew what I had done, but as merciful he still accepted me; by touch alone, I gathered\textsuperscript{14} strength, while he was gladly robbed. So I do not fear to be seen by my God now as I proclaim that he is the doctor of the weak, the savior of souls, and the master of nature, to whom I call out:

‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 18:

Throwing aside my reproach, I fled to you, the good doctor. Do not rouse your fury against me, and do not be angered by your maidservant,

for I have carried out what you wanted. You were instructing me before I considered doing the deed; you knew that my heart was crying to you:

‘Savior, save me!’

\textsuperscript{13} Mk 5:31; Lk 8:45. The use of the patronymic, Maisano observes, is mirrored in Mt 16:17 (Romano il Melodo, 315, no. 17).

\textsuperscript{14} Koder, Die Hymnen, 685. This agricultural metaphor is preserved in the German: “Von der Berührung allein erntete (lit. “reaped”) ich Stärkung.”
Strophe 19:

“Brace yourself, woman, for I was willing when you robbed me through your faith. Take courage!
It was not to convict you that I brought you into the midst of all these people, but to prove to them that I am glad to be robbed—I don’t refute it. Then recover your health, crying out to me until the end of your illness: ‘Savior, save me!’

Strophe 20:

Now this was not the work of my hand, but the wages of your faith,\(^\text{15}\) for many have touched my hem, but not attained power, since they did not offer faith; while you who touched me with much faith acquired health. That’s why I have brought you out before all, so you may call out: ‘Savior, save me!’”

Strophe 21:

O incomprehensible Son of God, who benevolently became flesh on our account, as you rescued the woman from blood before, rescue now me thus from my sins,\(^\text{16}\) you who alone are free from sin. By the prayers and intercessions of the saints, you who alone are powerful, incline my heart\(^\text{17}\) always to meditate upon your words, so that you may save me!

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\(^{15}\) Cf. Rom 4:4
\(^{16}\) Cf. Ps 50:16.
\(^{17}\) Ps 118(119).36, 148.
Appendix C: Samaritan Woman

C.1 Romanos Melodos, “On the Samaritan Woman”

C.1.1 Diplomatic Greek Edition

Manuscript title: κοντάκιον εἰς τὴν Σαμαρείτιδα

Liturgical context (according to manuscript): fourth Sunday of Easter.

Manuscripts: Patmos 213 (Q), f. 136r–138v.


Acrostic: τοῦ ταπεινοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ αἶνος

Refrain: ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν (“jubilance and deliverance”).

Προοίμιον

Ἐπὶ τὸ φρέαρ ὡς ἦλθεν ὁ Κύριος,
ἡ Σαμαρείτις ἠρώτα τὸν εὔσπλαγχνον·
“Παράσχον μοι τὸ ὕδωρ τῆς πίστεως,
καὶ λήψομαι τῆς κολυμβήθρας τὰ νάματα,
ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.”

1

Τὸ τάλαντον τὸ δοθέν σοι, ψυχή μου, μὴ ἀποκρύψῃς,
ἡμέρα ἀφθονίας ὑπενέγκῃς τὴν αἰσχύνην,
ἐν ἡμέρᾳ ἔν ἡ κρίνει ὁ Θεὸς τὴν οἰκουμένην.
Ἐρχόμενος γὰρ τότε, τὸ χρῆμα ἀπαιτήσει σε: οὐχ ὅσον ἐκομίσω, ἀλλ' ὅσον ἐπορίσω ψηφίσας μεθοδεύσει σε: σύν τόκῳ γὰρ τὸ δάνειον παρ' ἑκάστου λαμβάνει: ψυχή μου, μή ἀμέλει, ψυχή μου, εμπορεύου, ψυχή μου, δός καὶ λάβε, ἵν' ὅταν ἔλθῃ ὁ βασιλεύς σου, ἀντὶ τῆς πραγματείας σοι παράσχη ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

2 Οὐκ ἦς ἀξία τοῦ ἔχειν, καὶ ἔχεις ἀπερ κατέχεις σὺ τήν χάριν του δόντος, μή ὅσον ἐκομίσως τοὺς αἰτοῦσιν μεταδόντας, ὡς μετέδοκε ποτὲ ἡ Σαμαρείτις. Αντλήσασα γὰρ μόνη παρέσχε καὶ ἑτέροις ὡς ἐλαβέν· οὐδέστε αὐτὴν ἤτει, κἀκεῖνον ἐδωρεῖτο ἀφθόνως τοῖς χαρίσματος· διψᾷ καὶ δαψιλεύεται, μή πιούσα ποτίζει: ἀγμὴν μὴ γευσαμένη, ἀλλ' ὡς μεμεθυσμένη τοῖς ὁμοφύλοις κράζει· "Δεῦτε, ὀράτε· νάμα ὅ εὑρον· μή ὅστος ἡμὲς σου πελεί, ὁ παρέχων ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν;"" 

3 Ὑδάτων οὖν ἀθανάτων, ὡς εὑροῦσα, ἡμεῖς ἄρτι πιόντες ἐρευνήσωμεν καλῶς ὅλας τὰς φλέβας· μικρὸν δὲ καὶ τὰς λέξεις τὰς τοῦ εὐαγγελίου ἀναλάβωμεν, Χριστὸν σοφῶς ὁρῶντες τὸ ὕδωρ ὅπερ πάλαι ἢ Σαμαρείτις ἔπιεν,

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1 Grosidier de Matons suggests this reading over the manuscript which reads χρήμα, a homophone.
2 This verb is also found in Lk 14:28 and Rev 13:18.
3 Hunger, “Das Lebenspendende Wasser,” 126. Hunger points out that several of the phrases and economic terms in the first and second strophes resemble the biblical parables concerning money contained in Lk 19:11-27 and Mt 25:14-30.
4 Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 254. Maisano points out that this adverb is repeated at the close of the poem in strophe 22 v. 8 to emphasize once again abundance and overflowing.
5 Cf. Jn 4:29 Δεῦτε ὄρατε.
6 Hunger, “Das lebenspendende Wasser,” 127. This not only forms the theme of the kontakion, but this strophe also foregrounds the narrator as preacher, connecting the poem to the liturgy. Furthermore, various terms for water appear four times throughout this strophe: ὑδάτων (vv.1), ὕδωρ (vv.5,7), ὕδατος (vv.7).
7 Maisano follows de Matons who suggests ὁ διψῶντες to restore the meter of the line, citing Jn 7:37: ἐάν τις ἐρχέσθω προς με καὶ πινέτω for support. In Hunger’s reconstruction one finds κληρονόμοι. See Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 254.
καὶ πῶς αὕτη ἐξ ὕδατος ὕδωρ ἄλλο παρέσχε,
cαι τίνος χάριν τὸτε διψόντα οὐ ποτίζει, καὶ τί ἦν τὸ κωλῦν.
Πάντα γὰρ ταῦτα τὸ μεγαλεῖον,8
η βιβλίος, περιέχει καὶ παρέχει ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

4

Τί οὖν διδάσκει ἡ βιβλίος; Χριστός, φησίν, ὁ πηγάζων πνοὴν ζωῆς τοῖς ἀνθρώποις, ἀπὸ τῆς ὁδοιπορίας κοπάσας ἐπεκάθητο πηγή9 τῆς Σαμαρείας, καὶ καύσωνος ἦν ὥρα· ὡς ἕκτῃ γὰρ ὑπῆρχε, καθὼς γέγραπται, μεσούσης τῆς ἡμέρας. Μεσσίας ὅτε ἦλθε τοὺς ἐν νυκτὶ καταγάσας:

πηγὴ πηγὴν κατέλαβεν, ἀποπλύνων, οὐ πίνων· κρουνὸς ἀθανασίας τῷ ῥείθρῳ τῆς ἀθλίας ὡς ἐνδεής ἐπέστη· κάμνει βαδίζων ὁ ἐν θαλάσσῃ πεζεύσας ἀκαμάτως, ὁ παρέχων ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

5

Αλλ’ ὅτε ἦν ὁ οἰκτίρμων ἐπὶ τὸ φρέαρ, ὡς εἶπον, τότε γύνη Σαμαρείτις ἐπὶ ὤμων τὴν ὕδριαν ἤρε καὶ ἦλθεν ἐξελθοῦσα τὴν Συχάρ, πόλιν ἰδίαν. Και τὶς οὐ μακαρίζει τὴν ἐξ ὕδατος ἐκεῖνης καὶ τὴν εἴσοδον; ἐξῆλθε γὰρ ἐν ρύπῳ, εἰσῆλθε δὲ ἐν τύπῳ τῆς ἐκκλησίας ἄμωμος·

ἐξῆλθε καὶ ἐξητλήσα τὴν ζωὴν ῥητορὶς ὡς ἀστυπόχος· ἐξῆλθεν ὡφορός, εἰσῆλθε θεοφόρος· καὶ τὶς οὐ μακαρίζει τοῦτο τὸ θῆλυ, μάλλον δὲ σέβει τὴν εἶσοδον, τὸν τύπον, τὴν λαμβοῦσαν ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν;

6

Προσήλθεν οὖν ἡ ὁσία καὶ ἤντλησεν ἐν σοφίᾳ· τὸν γὰρ δεσπότην ἰδοῦσα κεκμηκότα καὶ διψόντα

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8 Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 255. Romanos’s contemporaries would have used this term for the Gospels. For instance see John Moschus, Prat 51.87; John Malalas p. 475, 13 CB, Cyril of Scythopolis, Vita Sab 32.
καὶ βοῶντα: "Γῦναι, δός μοι πιεῖν," οὔκ ἔτραχύνθη, ἀλλ' εἶπεν εἰλημμένος: "Καὶ πῶς σὺ, Ιουδαῖος ὢν, ἠτήσω με;" Ὑπέμνησε τὸ δόγμα, μετέπειτα τὸ πόμα φρονίμως ἐπηγγείλατο.

Οὐκ εἶπε γάρ: "Οὐ δίδωμι ἀλλοφύλῳ σοι πίνειν," ἀλλ' εἶπεν: "Πῶς ἠτήσω;" ὡς ποτὲ τῷ ἀγγέλῳ ἡ Θεοτόκος ἔφη: "Πῶς ἔσται τούτο; Πῶς ὁ ἁμήτωρ μητέρα με λαμβάνει ὁ παρέχων ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν;"

7

Ἰδοὺ μοι δύο εἰκόνων ζωγράφος ἡ Σαμαρεῖτις ἐκ τῆς Συχὰρ ἀνεφάνη· ἐκκλησίας, Σαμαρείας. Διὰ τοῦτο μὴ παρέλθωμεν αὐτήν· ἔχει γάρ τέρψιν.

Αὐτὸς γὰρ ἡμῖν τὴν πηγὴν πρὶν παρέσχε; καὶ πῶς σὺ λέγεις ἄρτι· "Ἔχω σοι δοῦναι νάματα ζῶντα οὐ λήγοντα διδοῦντα τῷ αἰτοῦντι ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν;

8

"Νῦν ἄκουσόν μου, ὦ γύναι," ὁ Ἰησοῦς ἀνεβόα· "εἰ ᾔδεις τὴν δωρεάν μου καὶ τίς ἐστιν ὁ εἰπών σοι· 'Ὕδωρ δός μοι,' σὺ ἂν ᾔτησας αὐτὸν πηγῆν ποτὶ παρέρχει; ὅτι καλοί οἱ λόγοι ἡς Σαμαρείτιδος· ὑποσκιογραφοῦσιν ἐπὶ τὸ φρέαρ τὴν κολυμβήθραν ἐξ ὧς λαμβάνει δούλην ὁ παρέχων ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

9

"Οὐκ οἶδας, γύναι, ὃ λέγω, οὐκ ἔφθασας ὅπου θέλω· διὸ τὰ ὦτά σου κλῖνον καὶ τὰς φρένας ἀνοίξόν μοι, ἵν' εἰσέλθω καὶ οἰκήσω ἐν αὐταῖς· οὕτω γὰρ θέλω·"
τοῦ ὕδατος γὰρ τούτου ὁ πίνων καθ’ ἑκάστην πάλιν διψήσεται·
tοῦ ὕδωρ δὲ ὃ δώσω τοῖς πίστει φλεγομένοις
ἐκ δίψης μὲν ἀνάψυξις·
γενήσεται γὰρ ἐνδοθές τοῖς πιστεύοντι τὸ ρεῖθρον
κρουνὸς ἀθανασίας ἀλλόμενος καὶ βρύων ζωήν τὴν αἰωνίαν·
tοῦτο γὰρ πρόηι ἐν τῇ ἐρήμῳ
οἱ ἢ Εβραῖοι ἦραν, ἀλλ’ οὐχ εὕρον
ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύσισιν."
ἠρνήσατο καὶ ἔλιπεν,
καὶ ἕνα ἐμνηστεύσατο· εἰς ὑδάτων δεσπότην·
καὶ τὸν ἐκτὸν οὐκ ἐσχε· καὶ αὕτη δὲ τούς πέντε
tῆς ἀσεβείας· ἀρτὶ λιποῦσα
tὸν ἐκτὸν ἐξ ὑδάτων· σὲ λαμβάνει,
ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

13

Μισήσωμεν τὰ εἴδη τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας·
η ἐξ ἐθνῶν νυμφευθεῖσα· ὡς πικρὰν ἀποστρέφεται
cαὶ ἀρνεῖται τὴν ἀμείνην; ὡς καὶ Ἐδραὶ γυλικεῖα.
Ἀλλ’ ἴσως ἔρωτις· “Τὰ πέντε εἴδη ταῦτα· τὶ ύπάρχουσιν;”
Ἡ τῶν εἰδώλων πλάνη· πολυειδὴς μὲν ἐστίν,
ἐρείπος ὑπὸ ἄρης·
ἀσέβειαν· ἀσέλγειαν· καὶ τὴν ἐπιμιξίαν,
πρὸς τούτους ἀσπλαγχνίαν· καὶ τὴν τεκνοφονίαν· ὡς καὶ Δαυὶδ
didάσκει·
“ἔθυσαν,” λέγων· “τοῖς δαιμονίοις
υἱοὺς καὶ θυγατέρας,” καὶ οὐκ εὑρον
ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

14

Ἀφῆκεν οὖν τὰ τοσαῦτα· ἡ ἐξ ἐθνῶν μνηστευθεῖσα,
cαὶ πρὸς τὸ τῆς κολυμβήθρας· φρέαρ τρέχει· ἐκεῖσε
cαὶ ἀρνεῖται τὰ ποτέ· ὡς καὶ Σαμαρεῖτης·
οὐκ ἔκρυψε γὰρ αὕτη· τὸν πάντα πρὶν γενέσθαι· ἐπιστάμενον,
ἀλλ’ ἔφησεν· “Οὐκ ἔσχον;” οὐκ εἶπε γάρ· “Οὐκ ἔσχον;”
nομίζω, τούτο λέγοντα·
“Ὁ ἐσχὸν ἄνδρας πρότερον· άλλ’ οὐ θέλω νῦν ἔχειν
ekεῖνον· ὡς καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν ἀρτὶ κατέχον
tὸν σαγηνεύσαντά με
ἐκ τοῦ βορβόρου· τῶν πονηρῶν·
pιστῶς ἀνελθαμένη· ἰνα λάβω
ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.”

10 This word is unique. The editions do not give much guidance, and so the translation of this line needs further consideration.
Νοήσασα ἡ ὁσία τὴν τοῦ σωτῆρος ἀξίαν ἐκ τῶν ἀποκαλυφθέντων, ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἐπεπόθει ἐπιγνῶναί τι ἐστὶ καὶ τίς ἐστιν ὁ πρὸς τὸ φρέαρ καὶ τάχα τοῖς τοιούτοις συνείχετο εἰκότως ἐνθυμήμασιν· "Θεὸς ὑπάρχει ἢ ἄνθρωπος ὃν βλέπω; Ὁυράνιος ἢ γῆϊνος; Ἦδοι γὰρ τὰ ἀμφότερα ἐν ἐντὸ μοι γνωρίζει, διψῶν τε καὶ ποτίζων, μανθάνων καὶ προλέγων, καὶ πάλιν προσκαλῶν με τὴν παρὰ νόμον καὶ προσδεικνύσθο Μοι τὰ σφαλματά πάντα, ἵνα λάβω ἀγιαλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

16

Οὐκοῦν οὐράνιος πέλει καὶ τὸ ἐπίγειον φέρει; εἰ οὖν Θεὸς καὶ βροτὸς ὁν, ὃς ἀνθρωπός μοι ἐδείχθη, καὶ διψῆσας με ποτίζει ως Θεὸς καὶ προσηκτεῖ. Οὐκ ἦν γὰρ ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ τὸ γνῶναί μου τὸν βίον καὶ ἐνθυμήσασθαι, ἀλλὰ τὸ αὐτοῦ καὶ εἰδέναι με και κηρύξατ ὁ πέλος; αὐτοῦ τὸν νοῦν ἀντλήσω, αὐτοῦ τὴν γνῶσιν πίω, αὐτοῦ τοῖς λόγοις πλύνω πάντα τὸν ρύπον τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν μου, ἵν’ ἀμωμήτω γνώσει ἀπολάβω ἀγιαλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

17

Υἱὲ βροτοῦ ως ὁρῶ σε, υἱὲ Θεοῦ ως νοῶ σε, σὺ φωτίσων μου τὰς φρένας, Κύριε, δίδαξά με τίς ὑπάρχεις,” χριστιανοί παρεκάλει Χριστόν ἢ Σαμαρεῖτις. "Ἤδοι σαρώσε σε βλέπω πιστῶς κατανοοῦσα, καὶ μή κρύψῃς μοι; μή ἄρα σὺ ὑπάρχεις Χριστός ὁ οἱ προφήται προείπον ὅτι ἐρχεται; Ἐὰν αὐτοὶ, ως ἔφρησαν, παρρησία εἰπὲ μοι; ὅρω γὰρ ὅτι ὅπως ἐπραξα γνωρίζει μοι καὶ τὰς καρδίας μου κρύφια πάντα καὶ χαθικεῖσθο γνώμη, ἵνα λάβω ἀγιαλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν."
Ἀλλ’ ὅτε εἶδεν ὁ βλέπων τὰς τῆς σοφῆς διαλέξεις καὶ τὸ πιστὸν τῆς καρδίας, παρευθὺς ἀπεκρίθη πρὸς τὸ θῆλυ. "Ὅν μὲν λέγεις Μεσσίαν, ὃν οἱ προφῆται νῦν ἔρχεσθαι προείπον, ὃς μὲν καὶ ἄκουεις τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ. Ἐγὼ εἰμί ὃν βλέπεις, εἰγὼ εἰμί ὃν ἔχεις ἐν μέσῳ τῆς καρδίας σου. Ἐγὼ ποθῶν σε ἴλυθα σε ἐλκύσαι καὶ σῶσαι; νῦν κηρυξὼν τοῖς πᾶσι τοῖς θέλουσι σωθῆναι ἐν τῇ Συχὰρ τῇ πόλει, τοῖς συγγενέσι καὶ συμπολίταις, καὶ δεύτε πάντες ἅμα οἱ διψῶντες ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.

19

Ἰδοὺ ἤντλησαι, γύναι, ἐκ λάκκου ταλαιπωρίας· ὁ μηδὲ ἄντλημα ἔχων τὴν καρδίαν σου καθῆρα ἄνευ πείρας καὶ ἀπέπλυνα τὸν νοῦν ἄνευ ναμάτων· καὶ ὅκισά σε θέλων, καὶ ἔδειξα ὃ πέλω καὶ οὐκ ἔπιον." Καὶ τούτων λεγομένων καὶ τελουμένων, οἱ μαθηταὶ ἐλήλυθαν· οὐκ ἤσαν γάρ, ὡς γέγραπται, πρὸς τὸ φρέαρ ἐν τούτοις, ἀλλʼ ἤλθον μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ γνόντες ταῦτα πάντα εὐθαυμάσαν βοῶντες: "Ὥ τῆς ἀφάτου φιλανθρωπίας· γυναῖко συγκατέβη, ὁ παρέχων ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν."

20

Νευροῦται ἡ Σαμαρεῖτις καὶ τρέχει πρὸς Σαμαρείτας, καταλιποῦσα τὴν κάλπιν καὶ λαβοῦσα ἐπὶ ὦμον τῆς καρδίας τὸν ἐπάξοντα νεφροῦς καὶ τὰς καρδίας· καὶ φθάσασα τὴν πόλιν, ἠσάλπισε τοῖς πᾶσιν οὕτως κράζουσα· "Πρεσβύται μετὰ παιδών, νεανίσκοι καὶ παρθένοι, ἐπὶ τὸ φρέαρ δράμετε· τὸ ὑδωρ ἐπεπόλευσε καὶ προχεῖται τοῖς πᾶσιν· ἐκεῖ κατείδον ἄνδρα, ὅν οὐ χρή λέγειν ἄνδρα· θεοῦ γὰρ ἔχει ἔργα πάντα μοι λέγων καὶ προφητεύων, ὁ πάντας σῶσαι θέλων καὶ παρέχων ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν."
Οὐδὲν ἄλος ὁὐκ ἔιπον οἱ κήρυκες τοῦ σωτῆρος, ὅτι συνόμιλον εὗρον τῷ γυναῖκι τὸν ἐλθόντα καὶ τεχθέντα ἐκ παρθένου ἐπὶ γῆς οἰκονομία· τροφὰς γὰρ ἀπελθόντες κομίσαι, εὗρον βρῶσιν ἀγεώργητον, διδοῦντα τοῖς αἰτοῦσι τροφὴν ἀθανασίας· πρὸς οὖς καὶ ἀπεκρίνατο· “Εμὸν βρῶμα τὸ θέλημα τοῦ πατρός μου ὑπάρχει· διὸ ἢν ἀγνοεῖτε τροφὴν ἐγὼ ἔσθιο, ἥπερ ἔσθιομένη πάσι πηγάξει πνοὴν τελεῖαν καὶ πίστιν ἀναφαίρετο, διδοῦντα ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.”

Συνῆλθε τῆς Σαμαρείας τὸ πλῆθος ἐπὶ τὸν πλάστην, καταλιπόντα τοὺς οἴκους, καὶ ἐδείχθησαν τῇ πίστει ὡς ἀγροὺς, γονεῖς καὶ φίλτρα, καὶ ἔσονται ἡμεῖς Θεοὶ καὶ σωτῆρὶ ἐκ παγίδων· αὐτοὶ δὲ ἔσονται μοι λαὸς ἡγιασμένος, κατοίκησιν ποιοῦντες τῇ ἀϊδίᾳ καὶ ἀχωρίστῳ Τριάδι τῇ ἀφθόνῳ πηγαζούσῃ ἀγαλλίασιν καὶ ἀπολύτρωσιν.”

C.1.2 Translation

Prooemium:

When the Lord came to the well, the woman of Samaria asked the compassionate one: “Give me the water of faith, and I shall receive the streams of that font, jubilance and deliverance!”

1 Jn 4:15.
Strophe 1:

My soul, do not conceal the talent granted to you,² lest you be weighed down with the shame of indolence on the day God judges the world;³ for when he comes he will demand the money back from you; he will reckon not only what you received, but also what you acquired, when he exacts your debt, for he collects the loan from each with interest.⁴ My soul, do not be careless;⁵ my soul, do business;⁶ my soul, give and take, so when your King comes, in return for your labor, he may grant you⁷ jubilance and deliverance!⁸

Strophe 2:

You are not worthy of what you have and have what you hold⁹ as a gift from the giver, so do not hesitate to share with those who ask, just as the woman of Samaria once shared. Although she drew the water by herself, she also offered to others what she collected; no one asked her, but she freely gave her gift to all. She thirsts but spills over; not having drunk, she offers drink; she has not yet tasted, but as a drunk shouts to her compatriots: “Come and see the stream which I have discovered!¹⁰ Is he not the one who offers jubilance and deliverance?”

Strophe 3:

We have just drunk from the waters of immortality

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³ Ps 9:9; Rom 2:16.
⁴ Mt 25:27; Lk 19:23.
⁵ Cf. 1 Tim 4:14.
⁶ The imagery of commerce and trade is found elsewhere in early Byzantine authors as noted by Mary B. Cunningham, “Andreas of Crete’s Homilies on Lazarus and Palm Sunday,” Studia Patristica 31 (1997): 22-41 (cited in Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 253 n. 9).
⁷ Cf. Mt 25:34.
⁸ Cf. Mt 25:21, 23.
⁹ The “you” addressed here is still the soul.
¹⁰ Jn 4:29.
which the faithful woman of Samaria had found,\(^{11}\) so let us examine carefully all the springs\(^ {12}\)
and recall for a moment the passages from the Gospel, we who see that Christ is the light, the water that formerly
the Samaritan woman was drinking, how from that water she offered another water, and why did she not give drink when he was thirsting—what was preventing her?
All these things the magnificent book, the Bible, contains and conveys, \textit{jubilance and deliverance}.

Strophe 4:

So what does the Bible teach? It says that Christ, gushing forth the breath of life for humans,\(^ {13}\) became weary from his journey and sat down at the well of Samaria; this was the period of heat, for it was the sixth hour, as is written,\(^ {14}\) in the middle of the day, when the Messiah came to shine on those in the night.\(^ {15}\) The well came upon the well, to cleanse and not to drink.
By the wretched woman’s stream, the spring of immortality appeared as inferior; he is tired from walking, the one who tirelessly\(^ {16}\) traversed the sea, the one who offers \textit{jubilance and deliverance}.

Strophe 5:

But as I said, when the merciful one was at the well, the woman of Samaria, who had gone out from her village of Sychar, came carrying a water vessel on her shoulders.\(^ {17}\) Who would not call blessed the going out and the coming in of that

\(^{11}\) Note here the baptismal and liturgical overtones to the imagery.
\(^{12}\) According to Grosdidier de Matons, this is a veiled reference to the springs of Jn 7:37 (332). This aside within the kontakion is also significant for how it assumes the recent reading of the biblical text itself or calls attention to the biblical text under examination.
\(^{13}\) Ps 35(36):10.
\(^{14}\) Jn 4:5-6; this detail specifies the middle of the day for this encounter.
\(^{15}\) Cf. Is 9:1.
\(^{16}\) Mt 14:25; Mk 6:48; Jn 6:19.
\(^{17}\) Jn 4:7-9.
woman?¹⁸
For she went out in filth, but she came back in the figure of the
unblemished church;
she went out and absorbed life like a sponge;
she went out a water-bearer; she came back a God-bearer. Who does not
bless this woman—
and even revere her, the woman from the nations, the figure, who receives
jubilance and deliverance?

Strophe 6:
The holy woman approached, then, and wisely drew water,
for she saw the Master tired and thirsty
crying aloud, “Woman, will you give me a drink!” She was not vexed,
but said thoughtfully, “And how can you, a Jew, ask me this?”¹⁹
She called to mind the precept, but then prudently²⁰ provided the drink;
she did not say, “I am not giving a foreigner a drink,”
but she said, “How can you ask this?” Just as the God-bearer said to the
angel:
“How can this be? How can the motherless one take me as a mother,²¹
He who offers
jubilance and deliverance?”

Strophe 7:

Look, the Samaritan woman from Sychar appeared to me
as a painter of two images: of the church and of Samaria,²²
so let us not pass her by, for she has delight to offer.
Let the woman speak again to her Maker, “How can you ask me this?
If I give you a drink, you will overturn the Jewish law by drinking,
and from the water I will receive you as a like-minded man.”

¹⁸ Throughout this strophe the poet plays with the imagery of departure and arrival, probably alluding to Ps 120(121):8: “The Lord will keep your going out (ἔξοδόν) and your coming in (εἴσοδόν)” and Deut 28:6:
“Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.”
¹⁹ Jn 4:7-9.
²⁰ This vocabulary links the Samaritan Woman to the parable of the Ten Virgins (Mt 25:1-13).
²¹ Lk 1:34.
²² The wording here has been hotly debated. Ephrem Lash, for instance, questions the plausibility of the parallel between the Church and Samaria. See Romanos, On the Life of Christ: Kontakia, trans. Ephrem Lash (London: Harper Collins, 1994), 66n11. The sole manuscript reads ἐκκλησίας καὶ Σαμαρείας. Michael Maas and C.A. Trypanis suggested an alternative reading: “the church and Mary” (ἐκκλησίας καὶ Μαρίας) which preserves the rhythm of the line. The lone manuscript clearly preserves the reading “of Samaria” which I have kept here. I believe the reading “of Mary” may align Romanos’s poem with predictable typologies, but I believe it de-emphasizes the woman’s role as an intercessor for her people.
The words of the Samaritan are so beautiful—they depict in the well the font from which he receives a servant, he who offers *jubilance and deliverance*.

Strophe 8:

“Now listen to me, woman,” Jesus exclaimed, “If you knew my gift and who it is that says to you, ‘Give me water,’ you would ask him for living streams, for he offers living water.” To this she retorted: “You do not carry a bucket, and the well is deep, so where is this water of yours from? You are not greater or better than our ancestor Jacob, are you? It was he who once gave us this spring; so how can you say, ‘I have living streams to give you, which do not cease giving to those who ask for *jubilance and deliverance*’?”

Strophe 9:

“You do not understand what I say, woman; you have not reached as far as I wish; so incline your ears and open your mind to me, that I may enter and dwell in it, for this is what I wish. Anyone who drinks of this water every day will thirst again, but the water I will give is relief from thirst for those burning with faith; there will be a spring of immortality bubbling up and pouring forth eternal life within those drinking from the stream. The Hebrews once drew from it in the desert, but they did not attain *jubilance and deliverance*.”

Strophe 10:

By these words the Samaritan was inflamed with thirst,

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23 Jn 4:10-12.  
24 Jn 4:10-12.  
26 Jn 4:13-14.  
27 Ex 15:23; Ex 17:6; Num 20:8; 1 Cor 10:4.  
28 1 Cor 10:4-5.
and the order was reversed: the woman who was first offering a drink now thirsted, and the one who thirsted at the beginning, suddenly offers; she falls down before him and says “Give me this water, Lord, so I need no longer run to this well which Jacob gave me!” Let what has grown old lay fallow, and new things flower; let the momentary pass away; the moment has come for the water you have. Let it pour forth and water me and those who in faith seek jubilance and deliverance.”

Strophe 11:

“If you wish for me to give you streams of unpolluted water, go and call your husband. I do not follow your way of thinking; I do not say to you: ‘You are a Samaritan, so how could you ask for water?’ I do not aggravate your thirst, for through thirst I drew you to thirst; I feigned thirst—I was even afflicted like someone thirsty—to show that you thirst. Now go, call your husband and come back!” But the woman said, “Oh, I have no husband.” And the Maker said to her: “Do you really not have one? For you have had five, but the sixth you do not have, that you may take in hand jubilance and deliverance.”

Strophe 12:

What wise enigmas! What wise features! With them are depicted the things of the church in the faith of the holy woman by true, unchanging colors, for the way that the woman with many husbands denied having one, thus the church denied and abandoned many gods like husbands, and from the water she espoused herself to one master. That one had five husbands, but the sixth she did not have; and this one, who had just abandoned the five impious ones,

29 Jn 4:15.
30 Jn 4:16-18.
31 Jn 4:16-18; the sixth bridegroom is Christ himself.
takes you as the sixth from the water, 
*jubilation and deliverance.*

Strophe 13:

Let us hate the forms of idolatry!
The married woman from the nations rejects as bitter and turns down the pleasure,\(^{32}\) which is a sweet root. But perhaps someone will ask: “These five forms, what are they?” The error of idols is multiform, yet it has five horns:\(^{33}\) impiety, licentiousness, intercourse; in addition to these, heartlessness and child murder,\(^{34}\) as David also teaches: “they sacrificed,” he says, “sons and daughters to the demons,”\(^{35}\) and they did not find *jubilation and deliverance.*

Strophe 14:

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\(^{32}\) There is disagreement over the proper way to render this word. In the Oxford edition, Maas notes that the word is “non intellegitur” (Maas and Trypanis, *Sancti Romani Melodi Cantica*, 69). De Matons offers several suggestions for rendering the word after noting a comparable term, ἀμοινῆς as found in a hymn of Basil. First De Matons postulates that it could be a rendering of the Hebrew for “faith” or πίστις: ἀμονή (De Matons, 342-343, no. 1). Alternatively, De Matons notes a similar sounding word in Latin, amoena meaning lovely or attractive. The sense of the passage would indicate that the word is an antonym for bitter, leading to gloss here. Johannes Koder notes biblical passages resonant with the notion of a “bitter root” such as Deut 29:18 and Heb 12:15. Additionally, Koder identifies a similar image within the genuine works of Ephrem from the *Hymns on Faith*. The Syriac text may be found in Edmund Beck, ed. *Des heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de fide*, CSCO 154/Syr.73 (Louvain: Secrétariat du CorpusSCO, 1955), *HFid* 12:9:

An English translation may be found in Ephrem the Syrian, *The Hymns on Faith*, trans. Jeffrey T. Wickes (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015), 132: “From the house of the circumcised and the place of the tares, a bowl full of new bread has gone out to us. From the bitter ones, a sweet fruit; from the murderers, the Healer who has healed all” While I find parallel somewhat suggestive, it is a relatively common biblical image. See also, *Kontakia of Romanos, Byzantine Melodist I: On the Person of Christ*, trans. Marjorie Carpenter (Columbia: University of Missouri, 1970), 92n42.


\(^{34}\) Cf. Wis 14:23-30.

\(^{35}\) Ps 105(106):37-38.
Therefore the betrothed [i.e. the church] from the nations abandoned all these things.
And there, to the well of the font, she runs
and turns down those she once had, just as the Samaritan woman once did;
she did not hide what happened before from the one who knows all things,
but she said, “I do not have.” She did not say, “I did not have.”
Expressing this, I believe:
“Even if I had prior husbands, I no longer want to have
those ones I had; for now I have you, who has ensnared me
from the mire of my evil deeds;\textsuperscript{36}
I have been drawn with faith, so I may receive
\textit{jubilance and deliverance.}”

Strophe 15:

When the saintly woman had recognized the dignity of the Savior
from what was revealed, she yearned even more
to understand why and who he was at the well.
And maybe she was occupied with thoughts such as these:
“Is it God or a human the one I am looking at?
From heaven or from earth?
See how he shows me the two in one,
he is thirsty but gives me a drink; he listens but foretells, and he even
invites me,
who is beyond the law, and presents me with
all [my] faults, so I may receive
\textit{jubilance and deliverance.}

Strophe 16:

Certainly he is not heavenly and bears an earthly form?\textsuperscript{37}
Even if he is God and mortal, he seems human to me,
but as a god he offers me a drink when he is thirsty and prophesies.
It was not proper for a human to have insight into my life and infer,\textsuperscript{38}
but for the invisible one who is now seen
[it is proper] to witness against and convict me.
It was up to him to know me and proclaim what I am—
may I draw from his mind, drink his knowledge, wash with his words
all the dirt of my sins away,

\textsuperscript{36} Cf. Mt 13:47.
\textsuperscript{37} Cf. 1 Cor 15:47-49.
\textsuperscript{38} Cf. 1 Cor 2:11; the editors express doubt regarding the wording of this line.
so that with an unstained mind I may receive
\textit{jubilance and deliverance}.

\textbf{Strophe 17:}

Son of a mortal, as I see you, son of a God, as I understand you,
illuminate my thoughts; Lord, teach me
who you are!” the woman of Samaria kindly beseeched Christ.
“Look, I see you clearly when I observe with faith, so do not hide from
me.
Are you not the Christ whom the prophets
foretold would come?\textsuperscript{39}
If you are, as they said, speak freely to me,
for I see that you reveal precisely what I have done and all the secrets
of my heart;\textsuperscript{40} and therefore
I entreat mindfully, so I may receive
\textit{jubilance and deliverance}.”

\textbf{Strophe 18:}

But when the One who sees considered the wise woman’s speech
and the faithfulness of her heart, he replied directly
to her: “The one you call Messiah, the one the prophets
foretold would come now, you are actually seeing and also hearing his
voice.\textsuperscript{41}
\textit{I am} the one you see; \textit{I am} the one you hold within your heart.
I was longing for you and came to attract and save you.
Now proclaim it to all who wish to be saved in the city of Sychar,
to your kin and fellow citizens,
and come together all who thirst for
\textit{jubilance and deliverance}.\textsuperscript{42}

\textbf{Strophe 19:}

Look, woman, you have been drawn up from a pit of suffering;\textsuperscript{43}
without even a bucket I captured your heart,
without flowing water I also washed your mind, without streams;

\textsuperscript{39} Jn 4:19, 25.
\textsuperscript{40} Jn 4:19, 25.
\textsuperscript{41} Jn 4:26.
\textsuperscript{42} Jn 4:26-30 is clearly referred to in this strophe and the rest that follow.
\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Ps 39:3.
and I came and dwelt in you as I wanted, and I showed who I am, but I did not drink.”

And when these things were said and done, the disciples came, for they were not, as is written, near the well during these events, but they came after this, and when they learned all these things, they were amazed and exclaimed:44 “Oh, ineffable benevolence! He lowered himself to a woman, the one offering *jubilance and deliverance.*”

Strophe 20:

The woman of Samaria braces herself and runs to the Samaritans;45 she leaves the pitcher but takes upon her heart’s shoulders the One who examines minds and hearts.46 And when she arrived at the city, she proclaimed to all crying thus: “Elders along with children, young men and maidens,47 hurry to the well! The water is overflowing and pouring forth for all. There I perceived a man, whom one should not call ‘man’, for he acts like God telling me everything and prophesying,48 he who wishes to save all and offers *jubilance and deliverance.*”

Strophe 21:

The heralds of the Savior said nothing at all, since they found him consorting with the woman, he who had come and was born of a virgin on earth as part of the prudential order. Having gone to get something to eat, they found uncultivated food, the one who gives the food of immortality to those who ask. And to them he replied: “My nourishment is the will of my Father;

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44 Jn 4:27.  
45 As Koder notes, the Greek of Jn 4:28 does not specify that the woman “runs,” but this is found in the Diatessaron (see Petersen, *Diatessaron*, 54).  
46 Ps 7:9-10.  
47 Ps 148(149):12.  
48 Jn 4:28-29.
so you do not know the food I eat.\textsuperscript{49} When eaten, it pours out a perfect breath for all and unshakable faith, giving \textit{jubilance and deliverance.”}

Strophe 22:

The crowd from Samaria gathered around the Maker; they had left their houses behind,\textsuperscript{50} and were shown through faith as houses for the one who spoke in the divinely inspired scriptures saying: “I will dwell and I will walk,” as is written,\textsuperscript{51} “in those houses that have left everything behind fields, parents, and loved ones,\textsuperscript{52} and I shall be their God and savior from snares; they will be a sanctified people for me,\textsuperscript{53} making their dwellings in the eternal and inseparable Trinity that abundantly pours out \textit{jubilance and deliverance.}

\textsuperscript{49} Jn 4:27, 31-34.  
\textsuperscript{50} Jn 4:30.  
\textsuperscript{51} Lev 26:11-12; 2 Cor 6:16; 2 Tim 3:16.  
\textsuperscript{52} Mt 19:26-29; Mk 10:29.  
\textsuperscript{53} Lev 26:11-12; 2 Cor 6:16.
Appendix D: Sinful Woman

D.1 Romanos Melodos

D.1.1 Diplomatic Greek Edition

Liturgical context (according to manuscript): Wednesday of Holy Week.

Readings from the Gospels: Mt 26:6-16 (Mt 24:36-26:2).¹

Manuscripts: Corsinianus 86 (C) f. 83r-86r (pr. I-II); Patmos (Q) 213 f. 77r-80r (pr. I); Vindobonensi (V) f. 102v-106r (pr. I-II)


Modern Language Translations: Maisano (Italian) I.272-289; Koder (German): Die Hymnen II.38.503511; Lash (English): Kontakia, 75-84; Carpenter (English): Kontakia, I.97-119.


Acrostic: τοῦ ταπεινοῦ Ῥωμανοῦ

Refrain: τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου (“the filth of my deeds”)

Προοίμιον I

Ὁ πόρνην καλέσας θυγατέραν, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός,
υἱὸν μετανοίας κάμε ἀναδείξας,
δέομαι, ῥῦσαι με
tοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.

Προοίμιον II

Κατέχουσα ἐν κατανύξει ἡ πόρνη τὰ ἱχνή σου
ἐβόα σοι ἐν μετανοίᾳ τῷ εἰδότι τὰ κρύφια, Χριστὲ ὁ Θεός·

¹ The other biblical texts referenced include: Mk 14:3-9; Lk 7:36-50; Jn 12:1-8; Ex 2:5-20; Job 1:13-22.
“Πῶς σοι ἀτενίσω τῷ ὄμματι 2 ἢ πάντας ἀπατῶσα τῷ βλέμματι; 3
Πῶς σε δυσωπήσω τὸν εὐσπλαγχνὸν ἢ σε παροργίσασα τὸν κτίστην μου;
Ἀλλὰ δέξαι τοῦτο τὸ μύρον πρὸς δυσώπησιν, Κύριε, 4
και δώρησαι μοι ἀφεσιν τῆς αἰσχύνης τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἐργῶν μου.”

1

Τὰ ῥήματα τοῦ Χριστοῦ καθάπερ ἄρωμα ταιρίωμεν πανταχοῦ, βλέπων ἢ πόρνη ποτὲ,
καὶ τοῖς πιστοῖς πάσιν πνοὴν ζωῆς χορηγοῦντα,
τὸν πεπραγμένον αὐτῷ τὸ δυσώδες ἐμίσησαν,
ἐννοοῦσα τὴν αἰσχύνην τὴν ἑαυτῆς· καὶ σκοποῦσα τὴν ὀδύνην τὴν ἐγγιγνομένην
πολλὴ γὰρ θλῖψις γίνεται τοῦ πόρνος ἐκεί,
ὁ εἰς εἰμί, καὶ ἐκομμάκη πέλω εἰς μάστιγας
ἀς πτοηθήσασα ἢ πόρνη· οὐκέτι ἔμεινε
τῷ βορβόρῳ τῶν ἐργῶν μου.

2

Οὐδέποτε τῶν κακῶν ἀποστῆναι βούλομαι· ὦν μνήσκομαι τῶν δεινῶν ὅν ἔκει μέλλω ὅραν,
οὕτως λογίζομαι τὴν τοῦ Χριστοῦ εὐσπλαγχνίαν,
πῶς περιῆλθε ζητῶν με τὸν γνώμῃ πλανώμενον·
δι’ ἐμὲ γὰρ πάντα τὸν ἑξερευνῆται
δι’ ἐμὲ καὶ Φαρισαίῳ συναριστᾷ ὁ τρέφων πάντας,
καὶ διδάσκει τὴν τράπεζαν θυσιαστήριον
ἐν ταύτῃ ἀνακαίνεται καὶ χαριζόμενος
τὴν ὀφειλὴν τῶν χρεώστας, ἵνα χαριστῇ πᾶς χρεώστης
προσέλθῃ λέγων: “Κύριε, λύτρωσαι με
τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἐργῶν μου.”

3

2 SC τοῖς ὄμμασι.
3 SC τοῖς νεύμασιν. Editors are split on this term. The reading τοῖς νεύμασιν reflects the Italian Codex. Maisano (following de Matons) prefers τοῖς νεύμασιν, despite the rarity of the word. He adds that it preserves a reference to Is 3:16 (274-275, no. 5). Tomadakis and Trypanis preserve the reading of the Patmos manuscript: τῷ βλέμματι.
4 Oxf. Ed. δέσποτα.
Ὑπέκνισεν ὡς ὦ ψυχή τῆς τραπέζης τοῦ Χριστοῦ τὴν πρώην μὲν ἁσωτον, νυνὶ δὲ καρτερικήν, τὴν ἐν ἄρχῃ κόνα καὶ ἐν τῷ τέλει άμνάδα, τὴν δουλὴν καὶ θυγατέρα, τὴν πάρνην καὶ σώφρονα, διὰ τοῦτο λίχνῳ δρόμῳ θάναι αὐτήν, καὶ λιποῦσα τὰ ψιχία τὰ ὑπ’ αὐτήν, τὸν ἄρτον ἐχόρτασεν, οὕτω πιστεύσασα· ἀλλ’ ὦ κραυγῇ ἐλυτρώθη, σιγῇ δὲ μᾶλλον ἔσώθη, κλαυθμῷ γὰρ εἶπεν· “Κύριε, ἔγειρόν με τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἐργῶν μου.”

4

Τὴν φρένα δὲ τῆς σοφῆς ἐρευνῆσαι ήθελον καὶ γνῶναι πῶς ἐν αὐτῇ ἐλαμψεν ὁ Ἱησοῦς, ὁ ὡραιότατος καὶ τῶν ὡραίων ὁ ἐργάτης, τοῦ τὴν ἱδέαν πρὶν ἴδῃ ἡ πόρνη ἐπόθησε. ὡς ἡ τῶν εὐαγγελίων βίβλος ἀνακειμένου ἐν οἰκίᾳ τοῦ Φαρισαίου, γυνὴ τις τότε ἠκούσε, ἅμα καὶ ἔσπευσε, ὡθήσασα τὴν ἑννοίαν πρὸς τὴν μετάνοιαν· “Ἀγε, λοιπόν, ὦ ψυχή μου, ἰδοὺ καμρὸς ὄν εξήτεις ἔπέστη ὁ καθαίρων σε· τί προσμένεις τῷ βορβόρῳ τῶν ἐργῶν σου;

5

Ἀπέρχομαι πρὸς αὐτόν, δι’ ἐμὲ γὰρ ἠλυθεν· ἀφίημι τοὺς ποτε, τὸν γὰρ νῦν πάνυ ποθῶ· καὶ ὡς φιλοῦντα με μυρίζω καὶ κολακεύω, κλαίω, στενάζω καὶ πείθω δικαίως ποθῆσαι με· ἀλλοιοῦμαι πρὸς τὸν πόθον τὸν ποθητοῦ, καὶ ὡς θέλει φιληθῆναι, οὕτω φιλῶ τὸν ἐραστήν μου πενθῶ καὶ κατακάμπτω, τοῦτο γὰρ βούλεται·

5 SC Ὑπέκνισεν.
6 SC λύτρωσαι.
7 SC κτίστης.
8 SC φησίν.
9 SC ἐμμένεις.
10 Oxf. Ed. ποθοῦντα.
σιγῶ καὶ περιστέλλομαι, τούτοις γὰρ τέρπεται· ἀναχωρῶ τῶν ἀρχαίων ἵνα ἀρέσω τῷ νέῳ· συντόμως ἀποτάσσομαι ἐμφυσῶσα τῷ βορβόρῳ τῶν ἔργων μου.

6

Προσέλθω οὖν πρὸς αὐτόν· φωτισθῶ, ὡς γέγραπται· ἐγείσο νῦν τῷ Χριστῷ, καὶ οὐ μὴ κατασχισθῶ· οὐκ ὤνειδίζει με, οὐ λέγει μοι· Ἐως ἄρτι ἦς ἐν τῷ σκότει, καὶ ἥλθες ἱδεῖν με τὸν ἥλιον.’

Διὰ τούτο μύρον αἴρω καὶ πορευθῶ· φωτιστήριον ποιήσω τὴν οἰκίαν τοῦ Φαρισαίου·

7

Ἐδέξατο η Ῥαὰβ κατασκόπους πρότερον καὶ τῆς δοχῆς τὸν μισθὸν ὡς πιστὴ εὕρεζω· τῆς γὰρ ζωῆς τύπος ὁ πέμψας τούτους ὑπῆρχε, τοῦ Ἰησοῦ μου βαστάζων τὸ τίμιον ὄνομα· Σωφρονοῦντας τότε πόρνη ξενοδοχεῖ, νῦν παρθένοις ἐκ παρθένου πόρνη ζητεῖ αλεῖψαι μύρῳ·

8

Ἰδοὺ καιρὸς ἔφθασεν ὃν ἱδεῖν ἔπόθησα· ἡμέρα μοι ἐλαίῳ καὶ δεκτὸς ἐνιαυτός· ἐν τοῖς τοῦ Σίμωνος οὐλίζεται ὁ Θεὸς μου·

---

11 SC Θεό.
12 Also understood as a “baptistery,” continuing the sacramental references of the passage.
13 Oxf. Ed. κεράσομαι.
14 Oxf. Ed. ἱλύος.
σπεύσω πρὸς τούτον καὶ κλαύσω, ὡς Ἄννα, τὴν στείρωσιν·
κἂν λογίσηται με Σίμων ἐν μεθυσμῷ,
ὡς Ἡλὶ τὴν Ἁπατήν τότε, μένω κάγῳ προσευχομένη,
ψυχὴν μονογενὴς ζητῶ ἤπερ ἀπώλεσα·
ὡς Σαμουὴλ τῆς ἀτέκνου,
τῆς στείρας ἦρες ὡς Ἡλὶ τῇ Ἄννῃ τότε,
τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.’”

9

Νευροῦται μὲν ἡ πιστὴ τοῖς τοιούτοις ῥήμασι,
ποιεῖται δὲ τὴν σπουδὴν πρὸς τὴν τοῦ μύρου ὄνην,
καὶ παραγίνεται βοῶσα τῷ μυροπράτῃ.
“Δός μοι, εἰ ἔχεις, ἐπάξιον μύρον τοῦ φίλου μου,
τοῦ δικαίως φιλουμένου καὶ καθαρῶς,
τοῦ πυρώσαντός μου πάντα15 καὶ τοὺς νεφροὺς καὶ τὴν καρδίαν·
μηδὲν περὶ τιμήματος· νῦν ἀμφιβάλλεις μοι.
Κἂν δέοι, μέχρι δέρματος καὶ τῶν ὀστέων μου,
ἑτοίμως ἔχω τοῦ δοῦναι ἵν’ εὑρω τί ἀποδοῦναι
τῷ σπεύσαντι καθᾶραί με· ἐκ τῆς ὄλης
tοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.”

10

Ὃ δὲ ἰδὼν τῆς σεμνῆς τὸ θερμὸν καὶ πρόθυμον,
φησὶν αὐτῇ: “Λέξον μοι τίς ἐστιν ὁ ἄγαπῶς,
ὁ ἰδὼν τὸ φίλτρον; ἂρα κἂν ἔχει τι ἄξιον δοῦναι18 τοῦ μύρου μου;”
Παραυτὰ δὲ ἡ ὄστια ἢρε φωνῆν
καὶ βοᾷ σὺν παρρησίᾳ τῷ σκευαστῇ τῶν ἀρωμάτων·
“ὦ ἄνθρωπε, τί λέγεις μοι; ἔχει τι ἄξιον;
Οὐδὲν αὐτοῦ ἀντάξιον τοῦ ἄξιόματος·
οὐκ οὐρανός, οὔτε γαῖα, οὔδ’ ὁλὸς τούτω ὁ κόσμος
συγκρίνεται τῷ σπεύσαντι ῥύσασθαι με
tοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.

11

15 SC μέλη.
16 SC τί.
17 SC ἐπύρωσε.
18 SC τοῦτοι.
Υἱός ἐστι τοῦ Δαυίδ, δι' αὐτὸ καὶ εὐποτος·
υἱὸς Θεοῦ καὶ Θεός, δι’ αὐτὸ πάνυ τερπνός·
ὁν ὡς εὕρεκα, ἀλλ’ ἤκουσα, καὶ ἐτρώθην
πρὸς τὴν ἱδέαν τοῦ ἐχοντος φύσιν ἀνείδεον.
Τὸν Δαυίδ ποτε ἱδοῦσα στέργει Μελχόλ·
ἐγὼ δὲ μὴ κατιδοῦσα τὸν ἐκ Δαυὶδ ποτε δι’ αὐτὸ
καὶ τῷ Δαυίδ πτωχεύοντι ποτὲ προσέδραμεν·
kαγὼ τὸν ἄδικον πλοῦτον ὑπερορῶ καὶ ὑνοῦμαι
tὸ μύρον τῷ καθαίροντι τὴν ψυχήν μου
tοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.”

12

Ῥημάτων δὲ τὸν εἱρμὸν σιωπῇ διέτεμε καὶ ἔλαβεν
ἡ σεμνὴ τὸ τερπνὸν μύρον αὐτῆς καὶ εἰς τὸν θάλαμον εὑρέθη
tὸ τερπνὸν μύρον αὐτῆς καὶ εἰς τὸν θάλαμον εὑρέθη
tὸ τοῦ Φαρισαίου τρέχουσα, ὡσπερ κληθείσα, μυρίσαι τὸ ἀριστον.
Ὁ δὲ Σίμων θεωρήσας τοῦτο αὐτό, τὸν δεσπότην καὶ τὴν πόρνην καὶ ἐαυτὸν ἤρξατο ψέγειν,
tὸν μὲν ὡς ἀγνοήσαντα τὴν προσεγγίσασαν,
tὴν δὲ ἀναισχυντήσασαν καὶ προσκυνήσασαν,
kαὶ ἐαυτὸν ὡς ἀσκέπτως δεξάμενον τοὺς τοιούτους, καὶ
tὴν κράζουσαν: “Ἐξελοῦ με τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.”

13

Ὡ ἄγνοια. Τί φησίν; “Τοῦτο μὲν ἐτέλεσα·
ἐκάλεσα Ἰησοῦν ὡς τῶν προφητῶν,
cαι ὥσπερ ἔνοικα· ἐγὼ ἐνόησαν· ἦν ἐκαστὸς ἡμῶν οἶδεν,
οὕτως καὶ ὥσπερ ἐγὼ· εἰ ἦν γὰρ προφήτης, ἐγίνοντον·”
Ὁ ἐτάξων δὲ καρδίας καὶ τοὺς νεφροὺς,
often this verb indicates the hidden knowledge of God, especially in patristic authors. See Maisano, Romano il Melodo, 285.

27 SC εἰςαλλομένους.

28 Oxf. Ed. τά.

29 SC λύτρωσαι.
Νῦν ὃτι σοι ἔδειξα τὴν πολὺ ποθοῦσάν με,30 διδάξω σε, βέλτιστε, τις ἐστίν ὁ δανειστής, καὶ ὑποδείξομαι σοι τοὺς τοῦτου χρεωφειλέτας, ἣν εἰς ὑπάρχεις, καὶ αὕτη ἢν βλέπες δακρύσσεις· δανειστὴς δὲ ἀμφοτέρων πέλω ἐγώ, καὶ οὐ μόνον ἀμφοτέρων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων πάντων ἐγὼ γὰρ πάσιν ἔχρησα· 
τὸν δανειστήν γὰρ τοῦ κόσμου, ἐν ὧν ἔχεις, ὃς ὁ Σίμων, ἐκέτεισαι καὶ βόησον· 'Δύτρωσαι με τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.'

17

Οὐ δύνασαι δοῦνα μοι ἀπερ ἐποφείλεις μοι· κἂν σίγησον, ἵνα σοι χαρισθῇ ἡ ὁφειλὴ· μὴ καταδίκαζε τὴν καταδεδικασμένην, μὴ εὐτελίσῃς τὴν εὐτελισμένην· ἤσύχασον· οὐ τῶν σῶν, οὐδὲ τῶν ταύτης· 
χρεωλύτης ἀμφοτέρων ἐγὼ εἰμι, μᾶλλον δὲ πάντων· νομίμως, Σίμων, ἔζησας, ἀλλ' ἐχρεώστησας· ἐλθὲ νῦν πρὸς τὴν χάριν μου ἵν' ἀπόδώσῃς μοι· ἴδε τὴν πόρνην ἢν βλέπεις καθάπερ τὴν ἐκκλησίαν βοῶσαν· 'Ἀποτάσσομαι, ἐμφυσῶσα τῷ βορβόρῳ τῶν ἔργων μου.'

18

'Ὑπάγετε· τὸ λοιπὸν τῶν χρεῶν ἐλύθητε· πορεύθητε· ἐνοχής παρεκτὸς πάσης ἐστέ· ἠλευθερώθητε· μὴ πάλιν ὑποταγῆτε· τοῦ χειρογράφου σχισθέντος, μὴ ἄλλο ποίησητε.' 
Τὸ αὐτὸ οὖν, Ἰησοῦ μου, λέει καίμοι, ἐπειδὴ σοι ἀποδοῦναι ἔχραςτο  ὃς ἐξήρθει· σὴν τόκον γὰρ ἀνήλωσα καὶ τὸ κεφάλαιον· διὸ μὴ ἄπατήσῃς με· ὃσον παρέσχες μοι, τοῦ τῆς ψυχῆς κεφαλαίου καὶ τῆς σαρκῆς μου τοῦ τόκου.31 
κουφίσας με ως εὐσπλαγχνος, ἀνειπίκτερος τοῦ βορβόρου τῶν ἔργων μου.

30 SC τὴν ποθοῦσάν με στοργῇ.
31 SC τὸν τόκον.
D.1.2 Translation

Prooemium I:

You who called a harlot “daughter,” Christ, my God,\(^1\)
and revealed me to be a son of repentance,
I implore you, deliver me from
*the filth of my deeds*\(^2\)

Prooemium II:

Following close upon your footsteps in compunction, the harlot
Was crying out in repentance to you, Christ, my God, who know what is
secret;\(^3\)
“How can I look at you, when I have beguiled everyone with a glance?
How can I win you over, compassionate one,
when I have angered you, my Creator?
But accept this perfume as an appeal, Lord,
And grant me release from the shame of,
*the filth of my deeds*”

Strophe 1:

When she saw the words of Christ as fragrance sprinkled everywhere,
and providing the breath of life for all the faithful,
the harlot detested the stench of her own acts,\(^4\)
As she considered her shame and thought about the misery caused by her
actions.
For there is much affliction for fornicators in that place.\(^5\)
I am one of them, and I am ready for the scourges\(^6\)
that the harlot feared. She remained a harlot no longer,
but I, although fearful, continue in
*the filth of my deeds.*

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1. Within the Gospels, Jesus only refers to the woman with a hemorrhage as daughter (Mk 5:34; Lk 8:48; Mt 9:22).
3. Ps 43:22
6. 1 Tim 1:15; Ps 37:18.
Strophe 2:

I never willingly refrain from evils;
I do not keep in mind the terrible things I will see there,\(^7\)
Nor do I consider the benevolence of Christ,
How he went about looking for me when I had knowingly gone astray.\(^8\)
For me he searches everywhere,
For me the nourisher of all also dines with a Pharisee,\(^9\)
And he shows the table to be an altar;
There he reclines and forgives
The debtors what they owe, so every debtor may boldly\(^{10}\)
approach and say, “Lord, release me from
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 3:

The scent of Christ’s table excited
the woman who was once debauched but is now steadfast,
in the beginning, a dog\(^{11}\) but in the end a lamb,
slave and daughter, harlot and chaste
and so in greedy pursuit she arrives at the table
and forsaking the crumbs underneath, she took up the bread.\(^{12}\)
Hungrier than the Canaanite woman before,\(^{13}\)
she fed her empty soul, for she so believed;
she was not released by a shout but rather saved in silence,
for she said in tears: “Lord, raise me up from
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 4:

I wanted to examine the mind of the wise woman
and to understand how in her shone Jesus,
the fairest and the craftsman of all that is fair,
whose form the harlot desired before she saw him.

\(^{7}\) The place implied here is hell.
\(^{8}\) Cf. Mt 18:12.
\(^{9}\) Lk 7:36-50; Lk 11:37.
\(^{10}\) Lk 7:41-43.
\(^{11}\) Cf. Mt 15:26; Mk 7:27.
\(^{12}\) The imagery of Mt 15:21-28 Mk 7:24-29 features prominently within this strophe.
\(^{13}\) Cf. Mt 15:21-28. Carpenter balks at the disruption of the narrative sequence, suggesting the παλαι may refer to a more ancient incident such as 1 Kgs 17:17-24 when Elijah raises the son of the woman of Zarepath (102, no. 5).
Just as the book of the Gospels proclaims,\textsuperscript{14}
when Christ reclined in the house of the pharisee,
Then a certain woman heard and hurried there at once,
Directing her thoughts towards repentance.
“Go then, my soul, behold, it is the occasion you have sought.\textsuperscript{15}
The one who purifies you is here. Why do you remain in
\textit{the filth of your deeds}?

Strophe 5:

I pursue him, for he has come on account of me;
I dismiss those I once knew, for now I desire him exceedingly;
And as one who desires me I anoint and dote upon him,
I weep, sigh, and persuade him to desire me justly.
I am changed for the desire of the desired one,
And as he wishes to be kissed,\textsuperscript{16} in that way I kiss my beloved;
I lament and kneel down, for that is what he wants;
I keep silence and conceal myself; for he delights in these actions;
I leave the former, so that I might win favor with the new.
Readily I renounce these things as I breathe upon\textsuperscript{17}
\textit{the filth of my deeds}.

Strophe 6:

Therefore let me go to him! Let me be illumined, as it has been written;
Let me now draw near to God/Christ, and let me not be dishonored.\textsuperscript{18}
He does not revile me; he does not say to me: “Up until now
You were in darkness, and you have come to see me, the sun.”\textsuperscript{19}
On this account let me take up perfume and proceed;
I will make the house of the Pharisee a baptistry;
For there I wash myself of my sin,
And there I am cleansed of my lawlessness;\textsuperscript{20}
With weeping, oil, and perfume I mix my bath,
And I bathe and wipe myself clean, and I flee from

\textsuperscript{14} Lk 7:36-50.
\textsuperscript{15} Cf. 2 Cor 6:2
\textsuperscript{16} In the Gospel of Luke (7:45), Jesus calls attention to Simon’s failure to give him a kiss upon his arrival.
\textsuperscript{17} Here Romanos alludes to the point in the baptismal service when the catechumen renounces the devil. By
blowing and spitting toward the west, the catechumen rejects Satan. For a fuller examination see Ephrem
Lash, \textit{On the Life of Christ}, 245. This same image is used in strophe 17.
\textsuperscript{18} Cf. Ps 33(34):6; Ps 118:116; James 4:8.
\textsuperscript{19} Cf. Mt 17:2
\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Acts 22:16; Ezek 36:33; Ps 50:4.
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 7:
Rahab even received spies once
And as a faithful one she found life was the reward for receiving them.
For the one who sent them was a figure of life,
The one bearing the honorable name of my Jesus;
At that time a harlot shows hospitality to the upright,
Now a harlot seeks a virgin born of a virgin to anoint him with perfume.
That former one set them free who she had concealed,
But I will hold fast the one whom I have loved,
Not as the spy of the land, but as the overseer s of all
do I seize him, and I am raised from the slime of
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 8:
Behold, time has come which I desired to see;
The day and a pleasing season shines for me.
My God is staying in the house of Simon.
I shall hurry to him, and I will weep as Hannah did over her barrenness;
And Simon might reckon me drunk,
Just as Elias once reckoned Hannah; I will persist praying
In silence calling out, “Lord, I have not asked for a child,
I seek a soul of single mindedness which I have lost!
Emmanuel, son of the husbandless one, you have removed the disgrace of
sterility just as Samuel did for the childless woman, so deliver a harlot from
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 9:
The faithful woman braces herself with these expressions;
And she makes haste to purchase the perfume,
And she draws near to the perfume dealer, calling out to him:
“Give me, if you have it, perfume worthy of my beloved,

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22 Just as the Septuagint, “Jesus” renders the name “Joshua,” underscoring the typology.
23 Cf. Is 61:2; Lk 4:19; 2 Cor 6:2.
24 1 Sam 1:10-15.
25 Wis 7:22.
26 Cf. Lk 1:25.
The one rightly and purely loved,
since he has kindled my mind and heart entirely.  
Do not dispute with me now about the value;  
If it is required* even my skin and bones  
I can readily give so that I find something to give  
To the one hastening to cleanse me from the matter of the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 10:

Seeing the fervor and eagerness of the godly woman,  
He said to her: “Tell me who is it whom you love,  
That he inspired you to buy a love charm?  
Does he have something truly worthy of being given my perfume?”  
At once the holy woman raised her voice,  
And called out in frank speech to the preparer of fragrance:  
“Sir, what are you saying to me? Does he have something worthy?  
Nothing is worthy of his lofty dignity -  
Neither sky, nor earth, nor the entire universe that is his -  
Is comparable to the one who hastens to deliver me from the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 11:

He is the Son of David and attractive on this account  
He is the Son of God and God and exceedingly delightful on this account.  
I have not caught sight of him, but I have heard and been wounded/convicted  
By the form of the one who possesses a formless nature.  
Upon seeing him, Michal at once loved* David,  
But without even beholding the son of David, I desire and love him.  
That woman disregarded all the trappings of royalty,  
And at once she ran towards David who was poor.  
I too disdain unjust wealth and buy  
Perfume for the one who cleanses my soul from the filth of my deeds.”

_____________

27 Ps 26:2.  
28 Cf. Ephrem, Serm 4.69 and 120.  
29 1 Sam 18:20-27.  
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Strophe 12:

With silence she cut through the sequence of words,
And the respectable woman took her delightful perfume.
And she entered the inner room of the Pharisee,
Hurrying as though called to perfume the meal.\(^{30}\)
But when Simon observed this
He began to censure the lord, the harlot, and himself
as the first was ignorant of (the type of) woman who approached him,
And as the second acted shamelessly and prostrated herself,
And himself for inadvisedly welcoming such people,
And especially the one the woman crying out: “Set me free from the filth of my deeds!”

Strophe 13:

O ignorance! What does he say? “This is what I have accomplished:
I called for Jesus as one of the prophets;
And he did not recognize the woman who each of us know,
This one didn’t even know; if he were a prophet, he would have known.”\(^{31}\)
The one who examines hearts and minds,\(^{32}\)
When he observed the wavering thoughts of the pharisee,
At once he became for him a sceptre of righteousness.\(^{33}\)
Saying “Simon, hear the generosity
that has come to you and to this woman,\(^{34}\) whom you see
Calling out with weeping: “Lord, raise me up from the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 14:

I appeared blameworthy to you, since I did not reprove
The woman hastening to escape her lawless deeds;
But it is not right, Simon, your ground for complaint is not reasonable.
Compare what I have said to you, and judge;
A lender had two debtors;

\(^{30}\) Here and what follows relates Lk 7:36-39.
\(^{31}\) Lk 7:36-39.
\(^{32}\) Ps 7:9; Jer 17:10.
\(^{33}\) Ps 44(45):7; Heb 1:8.
\(^{34}\) Lk 7:39-40.
One for five hundred, but the other for only fifty;\(^{35}\)
And since these ones at a loss as to how to repay,
The one who was owed forgave what he was owed;
Which of the two will love him more then?\(^{36}\) Tell me,
Who ought to have called out to him, 'you have saved me from
the filth of my deeds!'”

Strophe 15:

The wise pharisee listened and said:\(^{37}\)
“Teacher, truly it is clear to all
The one who ought to have loved him most
is the one for whom the lender had forgiven the greater amount.”
The Lord spoke to him about these things:
“You have replied rightly, Simon; It is in the way that just as you say;
The one whom you did not anoint, she has anointed;
The one you did wash with water, she has washed with tears;
The one whom you did not welcome by kissing, she kisses me as she cries out:
“I have held fast your feet, lest I fall into
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 16:

Now that I have shown you that she loves me much,
I will teach you, good man, who the creditor is,
And I will set forth for you who are his debtors.
You are one of them, and also this woman whom you see weeping.
But I am the the creditor for both,
And not only for you two, but for all humans.
For I have lent everything which they have -
Soul, breath, and senses - the body and movement;
As much as you are able, Simon, beseech and cry out
To the creditor of the world: “Release me from
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 17:

\(^{35}\) Lk 7:41-44.
\(^{36}\) Maisano, *Cantici*, 286. As Maisano points out, Lk 7:42 reads τίς οὖν αύτῶν. This may, reflect the text of the Diatessaron (see also Peteresen, *The Diatessaron*, 123).
\(^{37}\) Lk 7:43-49.
You are not able to give me those things you owe me.
If you can, keep silent, so that the debt might be forgiven you;
Do not condemn the woman who has condemned herself.\textsuperscript{38}
Do not disparage the woman who has disparaged herself; Keep silence.
I do not wish for anything of yours or of this woman;
For as the forgiver of debts for both of you, I have come for you and for
all;\textsuperscript{39}
According to the law, Simon, you lived, but you owed a debt;
Therefore come to my grace, so that you might give back to me;
Behold the harlot whom you see, just as the church
She cries out: “I renounce as I breath upon\textsuperscript{40}
the filth of my deeds.”

Strophe 18:

“Depart. From now on you have been set free from your debts;\textsuperscript{41}
Go forth. You are beyond all obligation.
You have been set free. Do not again be subjected.
Since the record of your debts has been ripped up, do not make
another.”\textsuperscript{42}

Therefore say this same thing also to me, my Jesus,
Since I am not strong enough to give back to you what I owe,
For I have consumed the capital with the interest.\textsuperscript{43}
On which account do not demand from me what you have provided me;
You who have relieved the capital of my soul and the interest of my flesh,
Relieving me as you are compassionate, set free and forgive me from
the filth of my deeds.”

\textsuperscript{38} Lk 6:37.
\textsuperscript{39} Cf. Akathistos Hymn 22.2.
\textsuperscript{40} This action echoes actions of rejecting Satan within the baptismal liturgy.
\textsuperscript{41} Within the Gospel, Jesus only addresses the woman, not Simon. See Lash, \textit{On the Life of Christ}, 84, no. 18.
\textsuperscript{42} Cf. Col 2:14. Koder identifies several instances of this image within Romanos’s larger corpus as well as the Akathistos Hymn 22.5. This biblical passage is also interpreted by Origen, \textit{Hom. in Gen} 13.4 and John Chrysostom, \textit{Hom. in Col.} 2.3 (see Maisano, 288, no. 59).
\textsuperscript{43} Cf. Mt 25:27; Lk 19:23.
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Biography

Erin Galgay Walsh graduated *summa cum laude* and Phi Beta Kappa from Boston College in 2007 with a BA in Classics and Theology. She pursued an MA in Theology with a full fellowship at Boston College and completed her comprehensive exams with distinction in 2009. At Duke University Divinity School, Erin was the recipient of a Ray C. Petry fellowship for an MTS degree. Her master’s thesis, “Ambrose and the Christian Understanding of *Liberalitas,*” earned her the inaugural Richard P. Heitzenrater Award for Excellence in History, and she graduated *summa cum laude* in 2012. Her doctoral studies were supported by Duke’s Graduate Program in Religion (2012-2017) as well as the Gurney Harris Kearns Summer Research fellowships (2013-2018). In 2016 Erin received a FLAS Summer Fellowship for training in Arabic at Georgetown University, and she conducted research at the Hill Museum and Manuscript Library in Collegeville, MN through a Heckman Research Fellowship. During the Spring of 2017, Erin won a Bass Teaching Fellowship. At the 2017 Annual Conference of the North American Patristics Society, her paper, “A Poetics of Divine Encounter: Preaching the Samaritan Woman,” was recognized as the Best Graduate Student Paper, and she was also awarded the Society’s Dissertation Grant for the 2017-2018. Erin was selected as a Junior Fellow in Byzantine Studies at Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection of Harvard University for 2018-2019. During her doctoral work Erin published two articles: “Holy Boldness: Narsai and Jacob Preaching the Canaanite Woman” (*Studia Patristica*) and “Mourning Eve: The Homily *On Women* as Attributed to Jacob of Serugh” (*Patristica Nordica Annuaria*).